AMBER HOLLIBAUGH SEMINAR IN THE CITY 2026 COURSE READER

QUEER ECONOMIES OF CARE:

EMBODIMENT, PLAY, AND THE ART OF HOLDING

Selected Writings from Gloria Anzaldúa, Sa'ed Atshan,
Leanne Betasamosake-Simpson, CA Conrad, Qwo-Li Driskill,
Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Prentis Hemphill, Amber Hollibaugh,
Ralph Hopkins, Mariame Kaba, Etgar Keret, Robin Wall Kimmerer,
Audre Lorde, Aurora Mattia, Mia Mingus, Larry Mitchell,
Cherríe Moraga, José Esteban Muñoz, Pat Parker,
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Sylvia Rivera,
Lou Sullivan, and Tourmaline.

Compiled by Gili Rappaport.

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CONTEXT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Amber Hollibaugh was a radical feminist, lesbian, scholar, artist, and lifelong activist. She founded **Queers for Economic Justice**, directed the **Lesbian AIDS Project at GMHC** (formerly Gay Men's Health Crisis), and established **Queer Survival Economies at the Barnard Center for Research on Women**. Her work advocated for sexual freedom, bodily autonomy, and collective survival. Her publications include *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* and the documentary *The Heart of the Matter*.

The Inaugural Amber Hollibaugh Seminar in the City, held in 2025 at **The Bureau for General Services-Queer Division**, revived the **Seminars in the City** series, which offered Queer Studies to New York City publics in the late 1990s. Initially held at **A Different Light** bookstore in Chelsea, topics included *Lesbian Lives, Theories, and Herstories*, *Queer Sex Work in the City*, and *Bringing Queer to the K-12 Classroom*. For the 2025 and 2026 seminars respectively, Gili Rappaport (Lead Instructor) offered *Queer Economies of Care: Community, Desire, and the Politics of Necessity* (2025), and *Queer Economies of Care: Community, Desire, and the Politics of Necessity: Embodiment, Play, and the Art of Holding* (2026). The 2026 seminar is held at **WOW Café Theater**, a historic and collectively-run performance space for women, trans, and nonbinary artists located in the East Village. Co-founded in 1980-1981 by a collective of feminist and lesbian artists, primarily led by Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, Pamela Camhe, and Jordy Mark, the space was quickly shaped by Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, Deb Margolin, and later the Five Lesbian Brothers. For current WOW programming check out wowcafe.org.

The Hollibaugh Seminar is co-sponsored by **CLAGS: The Center for LGBT Studies** (CUNY Graduate Center) and the **Barnard Center for Research on Women.** Special thanks to the Hollibaugh Committee, Matt Brim, Jasmina Sinanovic, Donna Huaman, and the whole team at CLAGS.

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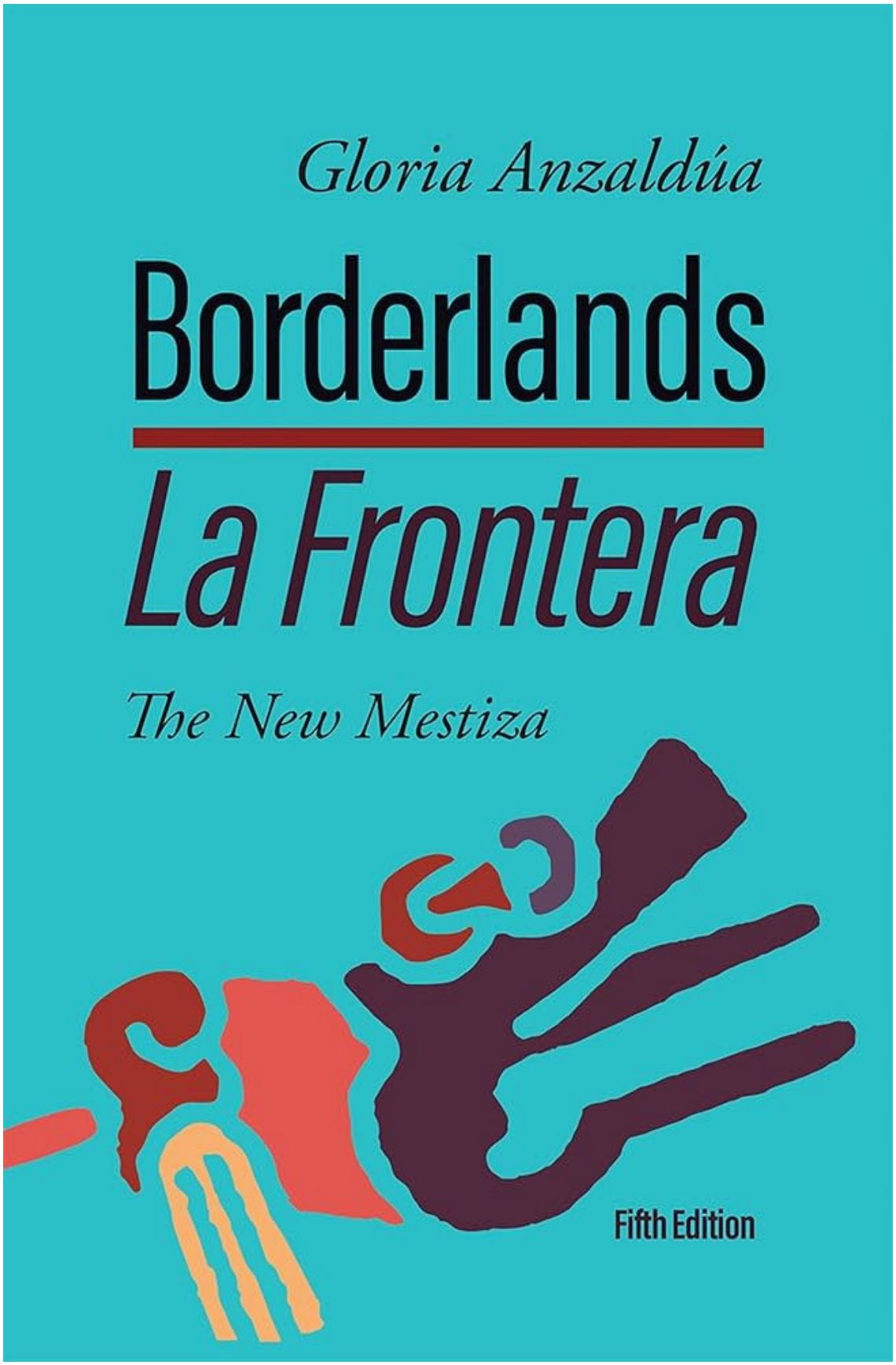
Gloria Anzaldúa
Borderlands
La Frontera
The New Mestiza
Fifth Edition

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

How to Tame a Wild Tongue

Gloria Anzaldúa was born in 1942 in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. At age eleven she began working in the fields as a migrant worker and then on her family's land after the death of her father. Working her way through school, she eventually became a schoolteacher and then an academic, speaking and writing about feminist, lesbian, and Chicana issues and about autobiography. She is best known for This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color *(1981), which she edited with Cherríe Moraga, and* Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza *(1987). Anzaldúa died in 2004.*

"How to Tame a Wild Tongue" is from Borderlands/La Frontera. *In it, Anzaldúa is concerned with many kinds of borders — between nations, cultures, classes, genders, languages. When she writes, "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language" (par. 27), Anzaldúa is arguing for the ways in which identity is intertwined with the way we speak and for the ways in which people can be made to feel ashamed of their own tongues. Keeping hers wild — ignoring the closing of linguistic borders — is Anzaldúa's way of asserting her identity.*

"We're going to have to control your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. "I can't cap that tooth yet, you're still draining," he says.

"We're going to have to do something about your tongue," I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. "I've never seen anything as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue,

train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?

> "Who is to say that robbing a people of
> its language is less violent than war?"
> — RAY GWYN SMITH[1]

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess — that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong."

"I want you to speak English. *Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que* 5
saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent,' " my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents.

Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

OVERCOMING THE TRADITION OF SILENCE

> *Ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro.*
> *Peleando con nuestra propia sombra*
> *el silencio nos sepulta.*

En boca cerrada no entran moscas. "Flies don't enter a closed mouth" is a saying I kept hearing when I was a child. *Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, *hablar pa' 'tras, repelar. Hocicona, repelona, chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*. In

my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women — I've never heard them applied to men.

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word *"nosotras,"* I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

> And our tongues have become
> dry the wilderness has
> dried out our tongues and
> we have forgotten speech.
> — IRENA KLEPFISZ[2]

Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia*.

Oyé como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera

> *Quien tiene boca se equivoca.*
> — MEXICAN SAYING

"*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's lan- 10
guage by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language," I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir.* Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of

communicating the realities and values true to themselves — a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest — for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*)

My "home" tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6 and 7 being closest to my heart. From school, the media, and job situations, I've picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Locha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I've picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From *los recién llegados*, Mexican immigrants, and *braceros*, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I'll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley, I picked up Chicano Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom, younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts, and older relatives.

With Chicanas from *Nuevo México* or *Arizona* I will speak Chicano Spanish a little, but often they don't understand what I'm saying. With most California Chicanas I speak entirely in English (unless I forget). When I first moved to San Francisco, I'd rattle off something in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana *tejana* that I can talk freely. 15

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or *pochismos*. The *pocho* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican

origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English.[3] Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother Nune and with Chicano *tejano* contemporaries I speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up *Pachuco*. *Pachuco* (the language of the zoot suiters) is a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. *Ruca* means girl or woman, *vato* means guy or dude, *chale* means no, *simón* means yes, *churro* is sure, talk is *periquiar, pigionear* means petting, *que gacho* means how nerdy, *ponte águila* means watch out, death is called *la pelona*. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the *Pachuco* tongue.

CHICANO SPANISH

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization, have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as *maíz/maiz, cohete/cuete*. We leave out certain consonants when they appear between vowels: *lado/lao, mojado/mojao*. Chicanos from South Texas pronounce *f* as *j* as in *jue (fue)*. Chicanos use "archaisms," words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say *semos, truje, haiga, ansina*, and *naiden*. We retain the "archaic" *j*, as in *jalar*, that derives from an earlier *h*, (the French *halar* or the Germanic *halon* which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. (Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majority of the Spanish colonizers in Mexico and the Southwest came from Extremadura — Hernán Cortés was one of them —

and Andalucía. Andalucians pronounce *ll* like a *y*, and their *d*'s tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: *tirado* becomes *tirao*. They brought *el lenguaje popular, dialectos y regionalismos*.[4])

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift *ll* to *y* and *z* to *s*.[5] We leave out initial syllables, saying *tar* for *estar, toy* for *estoy, hora* for *ahora* (*cubanos* and *puertorriqueños* also leave out initial letters of some words). We also leave out the final syllable such as *pa* for *para*. The intervocalic *y*, the *ll* as in *tortilla, ella, botella*, gets replaced by *tortia* or *tortiya, ea, botea*. We add an additional syllable at the beginning of certain words: *atocar* for *tocar, agastar* for *gastar*. Sometimes we'll say *lavaste las vacijas*, other times *lavates* (substituting the *ates* verb endings for the *aste*).

We use anglicisms, words borrowed from English: *bola* from ball, *carpeta* from carpet, *máchina de lavar* (instead of *lavadora*) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word such as *cookiar* for cook, *watchar* for watch, *parkiar* for park, and *rapiar* for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English. 20

We don't use the word *vosotros/as* or its accompanying verb form. We don't say *claro* (to mean yes), *imagínate*, or *me emociona*, unless we picked up Spanish from Latinas, out of a book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

LINGUISTIC TERRORISM

> *Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.* We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestisaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally, and linguistically *somos huérfanos* — we speak an orphan tongue.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out. Then

it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. *Pena.* Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a first language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my 25
native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with *mexicanas y latinas* we'll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're *agringadas* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the "real" Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes because French is considered more "cultured." But for a language to remain alive it must be used.[6] By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity — I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have

to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue — my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

> My fingers
> move sly against your palm
> Like women everywhere, we speak in code. . . .
> — MELANIE KAYE/KANTROWITZ[7]

"Vistas," corridos, y comida: My Native Tongue

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was *City of Night* by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I read *I Am Joaquín*[8] I was surprised to see a bilingual book by a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the 30
Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in — the Thursday night special of $1.00 a carload — that gave me a sense of belonging. *"Vámonos a las vistas,"* my mother would call out and we'd all — grandmother, brothers, sister, and cousins — squeeze into the car. We'd wolf down cheese and bologna white bread sandwiches while watching Pedro Infante in melodramatic tearjerkers like *Nosotros*

los pobres, the first "real" Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing *Cuando los hijos se van* and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing-type "westerns" of Jorge Negrete and Miquel Aceves Mejía. When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn't go to Mexican movies, or *bailes*, or tune their radios to *bolero*, *rancherita*, and *corrido* music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was *norteño* music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or *cantina* (bar) music. I grew up listening to *conjuntos*, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, *bajo sexto*, drums, and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when *corridos* — songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands — reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local *cantinas* and wafted in through my bedroom window.

Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas/Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The *corridos* are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa's song, *"La cucaracha,"* is the most famous one. *Corridos* of John F. Kennedy and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border *corrido* singers who was called *la Gloria de Tejas*. Her *"El tango negro,"* sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The everpresent *corridos* narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as entertaining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural mythmakers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, 35
especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland. Woodsmoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodsmoke perfuming my grandmother's clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the reek of cordite. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy *menudo, chile colorado* making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbequing *fajitas* in the backyard. Even now and 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork, and venison with *chile*. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* I would be eating if I were home.

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?"

> "Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside."
>
> — GERSHEN KAUFMAN[9]

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don't say *nosotros los americanos, o nosotros los españoles, o nosotros los hispanos*. We say *nosotros los mexicanos* (by *mexicanos* we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican

is a state of soul — not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres.
(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.)
— MEXICAN SAYING

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?" te dirá, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer *"soy mexicana"* and at others will say *"soy Chicana" o "soy tejana."* But I identified as *"Raza"* before I ever identified as *"mexicana"* or "Chicana."

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70–80 percent Indian.[10] We call ourselves Hispanic[11] or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American[12] to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when copping out).

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity — we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestory); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas. 40

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Ceasar Chavez and the farmworkers united and *I Am Joaquín* was

published and *la Raza Unida* party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul — we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together — who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, *tenémos que hacer la lucha. ¿Quién está protegiendo los ranchos de mi gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la fisura entre la india y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, si, el Chicano que anda como un ladrón en su propia casa.*

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us.[13] We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano* culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they've created, lie bleached. *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild, *nosotros losmexicanos-Chicanos* will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain.

Notes

1. Ray Gwyn Smith, *Moorland Is Cold Country*, unpublished book.

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QUEER PALESTINE AND THE EMPIRE OF CRITIQUE

Sa'ed Atshan

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1 LGBTQ Palestinians and the Politics of the Ordinary

Heterogeneity of Queer Palestinians

Today, the queer Palestinian subject is perpetually under the gaze of forces near and far. For many queer Palestinians, discovering oneself is the primary struggle. One may seek recognition from a con9 dante, support from an ally, a

sexual encounter with a stranger, love from a partner, acceptance from a family member, encouragement from a coworker, or an alliance with a civil society member. At the same time, the fear of being outed in these domains is also real. And in a number of cases that I have witnessed, those with whom queer Palestinians have had the most intimate relationships, such as a disgruntled roommate or an ex-lover seeking revenge, can be the ones to level such a threat. 4 is fear is exacerbated by the knowledge that queer Palestinians are under the surveillance of larger institutions and individuals, includ- ing the security services of Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority. 4 e risk of being arrested, interrogated, tortured, or trapped into becoming an informant is ever present; in plenty of incidents, families as well as armed groups have in5 icted violence against queer people.

Many queer Palestinians are also cognizant of the fact that there are now queer Palestinian activists who want to recruit them as fellow activists, bene- 9 ciaries of social services, or members of their personal and social networks. 4 ere are internationals seeking to identify queer Palestinians, whether they are global solidarity activists eager to connect LGBTQ Palestinian rights to their own platforms and agendas, critics of Israel who want to highlight the Israeli oppression of queer Palestinians, or right-wing and Islamopho- bic groups eager to highlight Palestinian homophobia. 4 is also includes Is- raeli civil society organizations willing to support queer Palestinians, inter- national journalists and human rights workers seeking queer Palestinian narratives to publish, foreign tourists in Israel/Palestine excited to explore the queer Palestinian scene, and academics and researchers aspiring to turn queer Palestinians into the subjects of their analysis. Although the search for queer Palestinians can at times be productive to their own self-actualization, the saturated gaze on such a small population has inevitably led to layers of surveillance. As feminist scholar Minoo Moallem has noted, violence is of- ten "intrinsic to the 9 xation of the gaze" and protection against violence itself can "become a site of violence."77

Within the queer Palestinian landscape, desire, actions, and categories of gender- and sexuality-based identities o! en do not necessarily map onto subjectivities in the same ways that they do in other parts of the world. Even within the Palestinian context, there is tremendous heterogeneity of experi- ence and self-identi9 cation. Half of the world's Palestinian population lives in exile or the Diaspora, what Palestinians call the *shataat!3* (or "scattering"). Within Israel, 0., million Palestinians live as second-class citizens, while -../million reside in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), mainly as

stateless noncitizens, and 0., million noncitizen Palestinians are in the Gaza Strip. According the American Friends Service Committee (a Quaker organization that 9 rst provided humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees in 0,$.), there are now over seven million Palestinian refugees worldwide (in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Diaspora).7&

4 e political and national context within which queer Palestinians exist shape their relationship to sexuality, with di6 erences between a Palestinian in a Lebanese refugee camp and someone who is a third-generation resident of Paris or Santiago. One's geographic location—whether Gaza City, Tel Aviv, or Jenin, for example—also plays a fundamental role in one's experience of queerness. Palestinians are cisgender and transgender, feminist and misogynist, religious and secular, Christian and Muslim, rich and poor, able-bodied and disabled, rural and urban, traditional and cosmopolitan, homebound and itinerant, politically le! and right, without regular access to a computer and online throughout the day, from stable families and broken families, and everything in between all these seemingly dichotomous spheres. 4 ese circumstances either expand or constrain the queer Palestinian's journey to realizing their sexual orientation.

4 ere are many individuals who are not conscious of their same-sex desires, while others repress that consciousness, and yet others actively work to deny and purge those desires through abstinence or a focus on heterosexuality. A villager from a farming family might live her entire life without ever hearing the term *almithliyyeh aljinsiyyeh* ("homosexuality") in Arabic, English, or any other language. 4 en there are queer Palestinians who are conscious of their homosexual desires and who engage in same-sex behaviors, whether in 5 eeting exchanges or in more permanent relationships. Many of those individuals may never consider that the label homosexual or bisexual applies to them, while others reject these labels entirely. A man could be married to a woman, with or without genuine attraction to her and with or without sustained sexual activity with her, and simultaneously have private sexual relations with other men while repudiating any connection to homosexuals. If such men are active and not passive sexual partners with their male lovers, then they can argue to themselves and others that it is merely their partners who are homosexual. Some queer Palestinians see themselves as homosexuals but keep it to themselves, while others share this part of themselves with a few trusted individuals, and still others are willing to be public about it. And again, one can 9 nd everything in between.

able.[3] The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that an average of [ ], percent of the global population disapproved of homosexuality and that this number was a marker of Israelis being "more open than most of the world."[7] Although queer Palestinian activists aspire to change Palestinian understanding of homosexuality, most believe it is impossible to do so radically without an end to the Israeli military occupation. As long as Palestinians are collectively denied freedom from Israeli captivity and domination, they cannot realize collective queer liberation within their society, considering that political and sexual freedom cannot be divorced. Queer Palestinian activists also are concerned that the invocation of figures related to Palestinian homophobia without context is problematic, especially when it is cited as further justification for the Israeli occupation. They are wary of essentializing Israeli and Palestinian attitudes on this issue and are worried that the juxtaposition can reinforce colonial logics. The facts nonetheless remain that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians do condemn homosexuality in moral terms and that this is the climate in which queer Palestinian activists must operate.

In July [ ]:, Palestinian writer Abbad Yahya was threatened with murder and later had to flee Palestine for a life in exile after the publication of his novel *Crime in Ramallah*. In it, he addressed themes of Palestinian corruption and included a gay main character who is portrayed as having oral sex with a man. The Palestinian Authority banned the book and stated that it "contained indecent texts and terms that threaten morality and public decency."[ ] Yahya had to deal with threats by Palestinians to burn down bookstores that carried it. Bookstore owners are still detained by the Palestinian Authority police for merely searching for the book. In reflecting on this ordeal and what it reveals about censorship and conservativism in the Arab world, journalist Joumana Haddad writes, "As for gay sex, it is the ultimate transgression. Never mind that Abu Nawas, one of the greatest Arab poets of all times, had written, back in the eighth and ninth centuries, countless erotic poems about his gay sexual encounters."[&] It is important to note that internal Palestinian violence is not outside the context of the military occupation but gets essentialized as "culture" in many Israeli and Western discourses on Palestinian society. All of these forms of violence must be acknowledged, and the Palestinian perpetrators should be held accountable. The broader conditions of structural and physical violence that result from the Israeli occupation must also be considered for their role in exacerbating internal forms of Palestinian violence and oppression.

Queer Palestinians view the possibility of a public gay pride parade in a West Bank or Gaza Strip city to be completely out of the question anytime soon. Although such a parade does not resonate for many queer Palestinians in the 9 rst place, it does for others, especially when they participate in such events outside of the country and are able to enjoy the opportunity for public expression. 4 is demonstrates how diverse symbols can belong to people di6 erently as well as express di6 erent desires. Palestinian gay pride marchers have not been attacked by homophobic vigilantes in Palestine because there has never been such a march. Queer Palestinians share the realistic expectation that such vigilantes and attacks would surface were they to dare to proceed with a parade. Although there is no coordinated widespread campaign in the West Bank by Palestinians to physically target queer Palestinians in a systematic fashion, the community does hear about instances of families attacking their own children or of Palestinian Authority security o cials using homosexuality against a gay Palestinian civilian. It is not common for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories to blur gender norms openly and visibly in public, but when it does happen it o! en results in verbal harassment or even physical attacks. A gay Palestinian man who le! the West Bank and then married a Canadian man in Ottawa lamented to me that they could not even conceive of holding their wedding ceremony in the West Bank and that they expected to be immediately killed and the entire venue being burned down if they dared to do so. 4 e situation in the Gaza Strip for queer people is becoming increasingly described as “hellish,” with devastating reports of harassment and torture.fh Hamas members are threatening anyone who dares to come out, and LGBTQ individuals face intense surveillance from Islamist groups. While openly advocating for their rights and for protection, queer Palestinians are challenging the fundamental linguistic foundation of their society, which is based on Arabic’s strict feminine-masculine binary of words and concepts. Both Palestinian Christian and Muslim clergy condemn homosexuality in the strongest terms. Palestinian nationalism has rei9 ed a neat association of gender, sexuality, and the norms of contribution with the struggle for national liberation. Palestinians, by and large, continue to see homosexuality as a Western phenomenon that comes with Western domination through cultural imperialism and a foreign conspiratorial erosion of morality.

Palestinian public discourse on sexuality in general, let alone on homosexuality, is limited, which is also at least partially a result of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians who are not addressing these taboos. Challeng-

ing the hegemonic gender- and sexual-based norms in Palestine is a cause for repercussion, and queer Palestinian activists display formidable courage in being visible and speaking openly on these issues. Although queer Pales- tinian activists are contributing to the public discourse on gender and sex- ual pluralism—for example, with initiatives to engage young Palestinians in educational institutions in Israel and the West Bank on these matters—the response of Palestinian society to queer Palestinian activism has been slow, gradual, limited, strategic, and selective. Queer Palestinian activists prefer more localized outreach to other queer Palestinians as well as to potential al- lies within Palestinian civil society. 4 ey cultivate these strategic alliances with internal constituencies whose attitudes on homosexuality re5 ect a will- ingness for more nuanced engagement with LGBTQ issues.

By and large, Palestinian society as a whole does not acknowledge the existence of homosexuals in their midst, unless it is in the form of haphazard characterizations of queer and trans Palestinians as immoral or mentally ill. As a result, queer Palestinian communities do not provoke repression from patriarchal authorities. It is an exceptional moment when a Palestinian authority openly targets queer Palestinians in a sustained manner, and it is equally rare that queer Palestinian activists challenge homophobia vociferously in the public domain. One example of the latter is a June -□0□ statement released in Arabic by 9 ! een Palestinian organizations in Israel, including As- wat and Al-Qaws, condemning an article by Sheikh Kamal Khatib, the dep- uty head of the Islamic Movement for Palestinians in Israel. 4 e signatories made a critical distinction between “di6 erence of opinions” and “discourse of hatred and incitement.”□ffl Khatib had used deeply hurtful and homopho- bic language to describe LGBTQ individuals as repulsive and to say that they made him “sick.” He wrote, “It is noteworthy that suspicious local organiza- tions, tabloids and biased writers have been advocating this perversion. To all those, I say not ‘may you be well and have boys’ but rather ‘may you be miser- able and su6 er plagues and AIDS, you perverts!’”□□ 4 e statement responding to Khatib re5 ected increasing sensitivity to homosexuality within Palestinian civil society in Israel. Balad, the Arab nationalist party in Israel, also issued a statement, equating its opposition to homophobia with its opposition to the “colonialist Israeli regime.”□8 It is challenging to 9 nd survey data of attitudes toward homosexuality among Palestinian citizens of Israel, but it would not be surprising if rates of acceptance among this population were con9 rmed to

One of the most challenging critiques that queer Palestinians must confront from other Palestinians is the notion that queerness, whether manifested as desire, practice, or identity, is not only a foreign concept in an Arab and Muslim context but also a vehicle through which Palestinian society is colonized, dominated, and politically and morally corrupted. For instance, in June -□0;, a Gaza-based news agency published images of the Tel Aviv Pride parade on its Facebook page with homophobic commentary in Arabic. 4 e text told of "a march with hundreds of thousands of perverts in the settlement of 'Tel Aviv' with the participation of members of the Zionist parliament and political and military 9 gures. 4 is activity happens annually in the place that has one of the highest rates of homosexuality in the world."□(4 e average Palestinian looking at this post felt a sense of loss that Israel captured this area of historic Palestine, frustration that they are denied access to this part of their ancestral homeland, and revulsion that homosexuals were marching so openly on this land and are part of the colonial project. 4 e perception that Israelis are likely to have more homosexuals than other societies is meant to serve as evidence of Israeli moral inferiority and their illegitimate presence in the Holy Land. Queer Palestinians must then grapple with how to repress and conceal the poisonous reality of their homosexuality so as not to be discovered and associated with these "inferior" Israelis.

4 e linking of homosexuality with the degradation of Palestinian society and the undermining of resistance to Israeli domination also became apparent in -□□:. Hamas took control of Gaza from Fatah, the secular Palestinian political group, that year. Before the takeover, Hamas leaders made homophobic statements such as Mahmoud Zahar's characterization of homosexuals as "a minority of perverts and the mentally and morally sick." When Hamas took Fatah's place in Gaza, they accused Fatah of "corruption, collaboration with Israel, and a total lack of morals, including homosexual relations between o□ cials."&) Hamas viewed the homosexual acts between members of their rival political group as evidence of Fatah's moral and political inferiority and as another reason to justify the need for Hamas to purify governance and society in Gaza. Homosexuality among Fatah members also further bolstered Hamas's depiction of Fatah as "little more than a gang of kleptocratic narcissists bent on sacri9 cing the future of the Palestinian people for their own self-enrichment. Homosexuality is just another indication of their corruption."&3 In March -□0;, the *New York Times* published a story titled "Hamas Commander, Accused of 4 e! and Gay Sex, Is Killed by His Own." 4 irty-four-

year-old Mahmoud Ishtiwi, a commander in Hamas's armed wing, was executed by the group. 4 e article reported,

> A dragnet investigation began, drawing in Mr. Ishtiwi's soldiers. Qassam o - cials found a man who claimed he had had sex with Mr. Ishtiwi and provided dates and locations. 4 ey concluded that the missing money had been used either to pay for sex or to keep the man quiet. If Israeli intelligence o cials knew Mr. Ishtiwi was gay, the o cials surmised, perhaps he had given them information in exchange for keeping a secret that, if uncovered, would have made him an outcast in his society.&7

Human Rights Watch investigated the extrajudicial execution, 9 nding that Ishtiwi had been detained in di6 erent locations for a year and tortured by Hamas's Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. 4 is included "beatings and suspension from the ceiling. He said his commander had beaten him about times with a hose, ordering him to confess."& Human Rights Watch also reported that "upon viewing the body, [his relatives] saw that scarred into his arms and legs was the Arabic word "wronged [مظلوم]," which [Ishtiwi] had apparently been cut into his body with a sharp implement."&& Hamas accused Ishtiwi of "moral violations" as a result of the allegations of homosexual acts; this was initially linked to the accusations of collaboration with Israel and 9 - nancial embezzlement. A! er being cleared of the latter two allegations, he was ultimately executed for the former. 4 is case demonstrates the association of homosexuality in Palestinian society with moral deprivation, political corruption, and betrayal of national, social, and religious norms.

Fatah members can also subscribe to homophobic logic and discourse. For instance, before a Jerusalem Pride parade, Sheikh Abu Sneineh and Azmi Shiukhi, "prominent Fatah activists" in Hebron, spoke against it at a press conference. 4 ey were alarmed that it was further "de9 ling Jerusalem" and that it constituted a "moral massacre" in Jerusalem.&fh 4 us, the mere presence of a queer body declaring itself as such is considered by many Palestinians to be an assault on their homeland. 4 e Fatah activists added, "4 e occupation hurts al-Aqsa and us but gives foreign anarchists defense and protection to march in the streets of the city. 4 is is a cancer whose objective is to destroy the Islamic nation through humiliating Jerusalem by demonstrating the perversions of gays and lesbians. 4 e world must unite against this ugly, unprecedented crime."&ffl For the most conservative segments of Palestinian society, the discovery of homosexuals in their midst is tremendously discon-

certing, revealing what is seen as an erosion of the proper masculine, moral nation that can ultimately prevail in the struggle against Israel. During Palestinian political contestations, the open presence of homosexuals in the op- posing group—whether it is Israel or a rival Palestinian group—can be used by Palestinian actors as a tool for delegitimization in the eyes of the Pales- tinian public. 4 e fact that Israel also utilizes Palestinian homosexual bod- ies for Israeli state projects puts queer Palestinians in an even more precari- ous position.

4 ere have been some reports that the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank is also employing, to a limited extent, certain methods of surveillance against gay Palestinians that are similar to those used by the Israeli security services. For instance, *Vice* journalist Nigel O'Connor recounts the story of "Saif," a gay Palestinian who reported the following:

> Saif is wondering what would happen if his homosexuality was made public. As a gay guy in the Palestinian West Bank, such information could see him murdered. While his sexuality remains hidden from his direct family, Saif said local Palestinian Authority police are aware and keep 9 les on him and other homosexuals, blackmailing them into working as spies and informants.&

Queer Palestinian activists have explicitly addressed the issue of blackmailing by Israeli occupation forces but not by the Palestinian Authority to the same extent.

4 ere are queer Palestinians who feel strongly that meaningful social change and protections for LGBTQ Palestinians cannot be realized unless the struggle against homophobia is waged in the public domain and on a much larger scale. 4 ey remain in the minority. Queer Palestinian activism is constantly being calibrated to avoid reaching the critical threshold at which activists and others would fear for their physical safety as a result of nascent campaigns against homosexuals. It is in the Gaza Strip where such homophobic campaigns can be found either in practice or on the horizon, with Hamas authorities policing what they deem to be moral and immoral. 4 is has included combating what they call "the masculinization of women and the feminization of men," which they see as signs from God, according to their view of the Islamic tradition, that the end of times and the Day of Judgment are near. Gays and lesbians, as well as those who cross-dress and those who adopt nontraditional gender roles, are seen by many Palestinians, through their interpretation of Islamic theology, as literally helping precipitate the end of the world. 4 is belief was repeated to me multiple times during my 9 eldwork.

Since Hamas points to gay pride parades in Israel as further signi9 ers of the foreignness of Israelis and their illegitimate presence on the land of historic Palestine, Palestinians openly marking their queerness in Palestinian society and publicly calling for an end to homophobia can be associated with a colonial subjectivity. Queer Palestinian activists are pressured to distance themselves from their queer Israeli counterparts to maintain their links to the Palestinian social fabric. And in othering homosexuals and gender-nonconforming individuals and in considering the very real risks of putting their voices and bodies on the line for queer liberation, these queer Palestinian activists 9 nd it convenient to shield themselves behind arguments such as, "Coming out and gay pride are Western." Although there are important reasons to distinguish LGBTQ rights agendas in Western contexts from those in a Palestinian context, the severe repression of displays of gender and sexual de9 ance of Palestinian social norms dramatically limits the ability of queer Palestinian self-realization and self-actualization. 4 ere are queer Palestinians who want to break down East-West binaries and create more spaces for queer Palestinians to lead their lives in ways that honor both their commitment to the national struggle and their desire to cultivate their personal relationships and networks. With the dominant social forces attempting to describe queerness and Palestinianness as mutually exclusive, queer Palestinian activists do feel pressure to render queerness as subordinate to Palestinian- ness so that they can feel safe, legitimate, and understood in their own soci- ety. Only privately, with trusted allies, can queer Palestinians explicate their queerness without omnipresent homophobia, and even then, internalized ho- mophobia is o! en latent.

4 ere are queer Palestinian activists and their allies who choose to challenge use of the term *homophobia* in the Palestinian context. Geographer Walaa Alqaisiya draws on her research and activist experience in Al-Qaws to problematize the applicability of the concept of homophobia in Palestine several times in one article.&8 I agree with some aspects of such analyses, es- pecially on the necessity of combining conceptions of queerness with those of anticoloniality. Yet I also question why all of Alqaisiya's references to ho- mophobia seem to have the purpose of undermining its salience as an ana- lytical category in relation to Palestine. My concern is that such an approach could contribute to the denial of the social fact of homophobia as a system of oppression. One cannot completely erase the very real embodied experi- ences of homophobia that queer Palestinians must negotiate regularly, even as

advanced about the limits of *homophobia* as a term. 4 ere is no concept that is free from all epistemic impurities.

Furthermore, Alqaisiya justi9 es not naming homophobia in Palestine with the argument from some queer Palestinian activists that they "live in a society that does not publicly discuss sexuality."&(Although robust discourses on sexuality can be found in the private sphere, it is true that robust public discourse on sexuality is generally lacking in Palestinian society. Many queer Palestinians do not believe that this should continue forever or that their culture should be viewed as static. 4 e LGBTQ movement in Palestine can contribute to more sex-positive discourse if the topic is approached sensitively. 4 is is a response to existing public discourse on sexuality in Palestinian communities and encompasses hegemonic gender and sexuality norms, including those that are homophobic. Queer Palestinians overwhelmingly do not want their queer struggle to be reduced to sex acts, just as the identities and experiences of heterosexuals should not be reduced to mere sex. What queer people do—or do not do—in their bedrooms is their business. 4 ey want to be able to make decisions about whether they should discuss their lives, pain, love, families, and relationships publicly without social ostracism or fear for their well-being. Straight Palestinians take for granted that they can do this in the public and private spheres because they can generally abide by conservative gender norms and heteronormativity. 4 at is not even an option for many queer Palestinians. Homophobia is largely what accounts for this double standard.

The LGBTQ Movement in Palestine

4 anks to the queer Palestinian movement, there are activists on the ground who have paved the way for the emergence of a Palestinian discourse resisting homophobia. 4 e year -□□- was foundational for the rise of the queer Palestinian movement in Israel/Palestine, with the establishment of Aswat (Palestinian Gay Women). 4 ey describe themselves as "a group of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning and queer Palestinian women," and they promote "safe, supportive and empowering spaces to express and address our personal, social and political struggles as a national indigenous minority liv- ing inside Israel; as women in a patriarchal society; and as LBTQI women in a wider hetero-normative culture." Registered in Israel and based in Haifa, As- wat focuses on the queer experience for that population of queer Palestinians, and their emphasis on women's experiences bolsters their feminist approach

to sexuality. 4 ey have reached hundreds of queer women in Israel/Palestine over the years. I have seen how their meeting spaces, with the support of the feminist organization Kayan, serve as refuges for many lesbian Palestinians. Aswat continues to function today with publications, workshops, and community engagement to support queer women, to shape the discourse on gender and sexuality in Palestinian society, and to contribute to the larger Palestinian struggle for rights and freedom.

In -□□:, Al-Qaws (Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society) was established and registered in Israel. Al-Qaws also has one o□ ce in Jerusalem. 4 e organization works with queer Palestinian activists across Israel and the West Bank. Al-Qaws includes men and women and increasing numbers of trans as well as gender-nonconforming individuals. Both Al-Qaws and As- wat have boards, retain few paid sta6 members, and are largely dependent on foreign aid for their programming. Both also have women Palestinian citi- zens of Israel as their leadership's most visible global 9 gures, namely, Ghadir Sha9 e for Aswat and Haneen Maikey for Al-Qaws.

Maikey had previously served as the sta6 member tasked with support- ing queer Palestinians for the Jerusalem Open House, an Israeli LGBTQ organization. A! er disagreements with the Open House about how to best support queer Palestinians both within and outside of Jerusalem, Maikey worked with other queer Palestinians to establish their own institution, Al-Qaws. Al-Qaws shares Aswat's mission to create an alternative discourse on gen- der and sexuality within Palestinian society and to facilitate queer Palestin- ians becoming part of the larger Palestinian solidarity movement. Al-Qaws is known for its hotline, which is implemented in partnership with Aswat, that provides support for Palestinians with questions and concerns about their sexuality. Al-Qaws also organizes monthly queer Palestinian parties in Tel Aviv (these also serve as fundraisers for the organization). 4 ey engage in civil society outreach e6 orts with potential Palestinian partner institutions and facilitate ongoing queer Palestinian empowerment workshops that take place in the West Bank. Al-Qaws's work, which continues today, also includes creative projects such as the production of youth music that a□ rms and pro- motes gender and sexual pluralism in Arabic and in a manner that addresses fellow Palestinians.

During my 9 eldwork, I cofacilitated an LGBTQ workshop series and also spent signi9 cant time in the safe house that Al-Qaws set up for queer Palestinian activists in the West Bank. 4 is is a place where they could gather, collaborate, and support one another. 4 e precise location of the house was

not known to others outside the queer Palestinian community. Strict protocol around keeping the location of the house secret ensured that the space was protected. Al-Qaws has since shut it down. Although queer Palestinians do come together in spaces across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the challenges of securing queer-devoted activist space in the Occupied Territories are tremendous.

4 e members of Gaza's queer population are almost impossible to reach as a result of the Israeli- and Egyptian-imposed blockade on Gaza as well as Hamas control of the area, yet they o! en follow queer Palestinian activism online. Many queer Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank are also aware of Aswat and Al-Qaws. While most individuals in Gaza are not active with these organizations, they nonetheless follow their activities, press releases, social media accounts, and coverage in the global press with delight that such entities exist to represent queer Palestinians. We know this from queer Palestinians who had previously been completely in the closet and, a! er con-9 ding in others, went on to share the boost in morale they experienced after learning about queer Palestinian groups online. At the same time, other queer Palestinians feel that those activists cannot speak for them. Queer Palestinian activists do not purport to speak on behalf of all queer Palestinians, but local and international actors do sometimes take statements from leaders of these groups in an attempt to embody a supposedly authentic queer Palestinian voice. It is important to note that such a voice cannot exist.

In a context such as occupied Palestine, where there are so many layers of political and psychological violence, surveillance is necessarily multi layered also. 4 e politics of hiding and revealing can be deeply painful. A gay Palestinian man unable to muster erections a! er being pressured to marry a woman su6 ers a particular form of anguish—with concerns about his erectile dysfunction being linked to his homosexuality—as well as the shame and humiliation of not meeting the masculinist community's overwhelming expectations of virility. Also, society, activists, and academics too o! en neglect to discuss the victimization of the women trapped in these situations. 4 e sexual performance of Palestinian men and the fertility of their wives are o! en mechanisms not only for passing down the family's lineage but also for contributing to the national struggle in the face of ethnic cleansing.fh) LGBTQ Palestinians also experience anguish because they are unable to meet others for companionship, sex, love, and friendship in person and therefore depend on virtual spaces facilitated by queer websites. 4 ere is constant fear

that one's family may 9 nd that browsing history or that an intelligence o cer could be monitoring that behavior, therefore revealing poisonous knowledge and leading to any number of devastating outcomes.

Queer Palestinian activism aimed at ameliorating the negative e6 ects of coming out to others in Palestine and at transforming the connotation of queerness from poison to love is to be lauded. Queer Palestinian solidarity activism around the world is then enhanced, and the extraordinary signi9 cance of ordinary queer Palestinian organizing and community-building in local contexts in Israel/Palestine is accounted for. Attention to the ordinary necessitates attention to the body—and the ontology of queer Palestinian bodies demonstrates how homophobia and imperialism cannot be divorced because they are simultaneously physically mapped onto subjects.

Activists must also confront the concern from other queer Palestinian activists, LGBTQ Palestinians in general, and Palestinians at large (and even internationals) that queer liberation is not a priority for Palestine at this time. 4 is critique posits that Palestinians facing threats of displacement, dispossession, and detention from Israeli military occupation forces do not have the luxury of worrying about whether two men or two women should be allowed to be intimate in bed. Such simplistic logic reduces queer identities and experiences to speci9 c and narrow sexual acts—disregarding varied LGBTQ understandings of self, struggle, and solidarity. 4 e removal of homophobia from an intersectional articulation of liberation from all forms of oppression resuscitates homophobia. When a young lesbian Palestinian woman is forced by her family to marry a man, she must anticipate the high likelihood of a life of marital rape. Whether she seeks support before or a! er the marriage is consummated, or both, her priority may very well become the need to escape Palestine over resistance to Israeli occupation. 4 e desire of a queer Palestinian activist to ensure that there are resources, options, and emotional support for such a person as she navigates pragmatic needs for survival cannot be dismissed as a luxury that must deferred to the struggle against Zionism.

LGBTQ Palestinians recognize that an end to Israeli oppression would likely make it easier to empower and liberate queer and trans Palestinians (assuming that the next system of governance for Palestinians would enable political freedom and individual liberties). Like their feminist counterparts and like many feminists among them, queer Palestinians cannot be required, even when some of them acquiesce, to halt the struggle against heteropatriarchy in Palestine. For most queer Palestinians, that struggle is no more and

no less critical than the 9 ght for Palestinian national self-determination. Although Palestinian feminists too have a long road ahead, the precedent they have established in Palestine is inspiring. For decades now, many Palestin- ian feminists have clearly articulated their rejection of the notion that discus- sions surrounding—and work toward—gender justice should wait until a! er Palestine is free.

4 e heart of Al-Qaws and Aswat's work is the determination to have queer Palestinians shape education about queer Palestinians, in both Israel and the Occupied Territories. 4 is ability to de9 ne a queer Palestinian agenda happens when a professional advocacy group is created to train and support Palestinian therapists who are allies to the LGBTQ community, or when groups in the cities of Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Ramallah are nurtured to empower queer Palestinian youth in particular to have a space of their own with a trained facilitator. Al-Qaws established its local presence in Israel/Palestine when, in an e6 ort to educate their society about LGBTQ issues, queer Palestinian activists produced a series of professional short videos circulated online about their experiences with homophobia. De9 ning a queer Palestinian agenda also happens when a volunteer spends an hour using newly gained conceptual tools to support the increasing number of Palestinians who identify as transgender and call the queer hotline for assistance. Al-Qaws realizes its mission while enabling community organizers to develop further programming for LGBTQ individuals from di6 erent parts of historic Palestine. Al-Qaws also simultaneously runs regular support groups for LGBTQ Palestinians and maintains Hawamesh, a monthly public discussion forum in Haifa to engage the public on gender and sexual diversity.

Queer Palestinian activists have published dozens of articles in Arabic and English in forums such as www.qadita.net (a widely read Arabic literature and politics website now on hiatus but with its entire archive available online) and *Jadal* (the journal of Mada al-Carmel Arab Center for Applied Social Research).fh3 Al-Qaws contributes to developing further resources for queer Palestinians that speak to their particular experiences and local con- texts. For example, www.qadita.net published an article in August -00 by queer Palestinian activists in Arabic titled "4 e Palestinian Sexuality Move- ment: From Identity to Queer Politics,"fh7 and *Jadal*'s twenty-fourth issue in- cluded 9 ve articles in English on gender and sexuality in Palestine. Some in- dividuals on the right and le! have attempted to undermine this activism by emphasizing the fact that much of it has been catalyzed by queer Palestin-

ian citizens of Israel. 4 ese activists reject such attempts to sever them from the Palestinian social fabric in the Occupied Territories, particularly because the Israeli state is already invested in such severance. Other individuals critique queer Palestinian activists for their use of English (in addition to Ara- bic), even though these activists are, in fact, mainly using Arabic. At the same time, these activists are thoughtful about the need to reach wider audiences through English in an interconnected world in which they feel that solidarity from abroad is essential, including from queer Palestinians in the Diaspora.

Queer Palestinian activists, in joining mainstream Palestinian human rights activism that is not necessarily LGBTQ related, have helped Palestinians start to see LGBTQ individuals not as collaborating with Israel or as anti- thetical and foreign to Arab and Muslim values but instead as integral to the movement for national liberation. 4 e queer Palestinian movement should not be de9 ned merely by its resistance to Zionism—as is done by many het- erosexual Palestinian activists. 4 ere must be increased space for queer Pal- estinians to resist oppressive internal social norms that are meant to dictate expressions of gender and sexuality. It is both in the public de9 ance of social taboos and in the ordinary de9 ance of everyday queer Palestinians (particu- larly those who are not activists with existing organizations) that the founda- tions for future gender and sexual pluralism in Palestine have been laid. It is in the linking of national and sexual struggles that a broader conception of emancipation is possible.

4 e ruptures to imposed patriarchy and heteronormativity, strict gender binaries, and marriage within Palestinian society do not o! en occur in the public sphere. 4 ese ruptures, however, are becoming more accepted in the private sphere and are nascent in the public sphere. 4 e queer movement in Palestine needs not only to continue its work toward queer liberation but also to expand spaces in which sexual and national politics can come together. 4 ere are many examples of queer Palestinian activists asserting their existence and delineating their struggles within Palestinian society—and these voices need to be heard more vociferously in the global queer Palestinian solidarity movement.

When Al-Qaws activists sprayed gra ti in the West Bank of two men kissing in one spot and two women kissing in another spot, with the caption "Queers passed by here," they were addressing fellow queer Palestinians to let them know they are not alone. 4 e activists were also addressing heterosexual Palestinians who expect queer Palestinians to remain completely invisible. In

May -□0□, “hundreds of people attended the launch of an album featuring local Palestinian musicians”fh□ in Haifa as part of an Al-Qaws event. 4 e event was part of the project Singing Sexuality, in which artists produced “photographs, videos, music and written testimonials and information”fh& in Arabic that challenged gender and sexual norms in Palestinian society.fhfh Al-Qaws’s Haneen Maikey contextualized Singing Sexuality “as part of the larger Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation, colonialism and discrimination, both inside present-day Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.”fhffl She added, “Part of how I see and understand resistance is that when we de- colonize Palestine, I will have a society that I can rely on, a society that is ready to [respond to] di6 erent social and political processes, that can respect the Other, [and] have openness about di6 erent sexuality and behavior.”fh□

Safa Tamish, director of Muntada, the Arab Forum for Sexuality, Education and Health in Palestine, re5 ected on this, explaining that “while sexuality in general and LGBT rights in particular are not openly talked about, Palestinian society has seen an increased willingness to discuss these issues in recent years.”fh8 Tamish also noted, “I think there has been a shi! in people’s perception. I’m not saying that Palestinian society is so pro-gay rights. I cannot say that, but I can say that it is more and more acceptable. 4 e fact is that we know of many, many families that accepted their children.”fh(She added, “Within Palestinian society, I see that there [has been] a real transformation in the last four or 9 ve years.”ffl) Tamish’s insights reveal emerging trends that we see among some younger urban, more socioeconomically advantaged Palestinians.

In December -□0□, Aswat premiered its 9 rst queer Palestinian 9 lm festival. During the three-day event, “a handful of Haifa co6 ee shops and art venues opened up a dialogue about the overlaps of occupation and sexuality; and of the borders of individual identity in the context of an uncertain international existence.”ffl3 Hanan Wakeem, Aswat’s educational director, stated that the festival was a response to the fact that “most 9 lms talking about gay Palestinians are made by Israeli or Western eyes, and they don’t represent the real voice of Palestinians.”ffl7 Aswat’s work has been to reclaim queer Palestinian voices as they encounter criticism and appropriation from all directions.

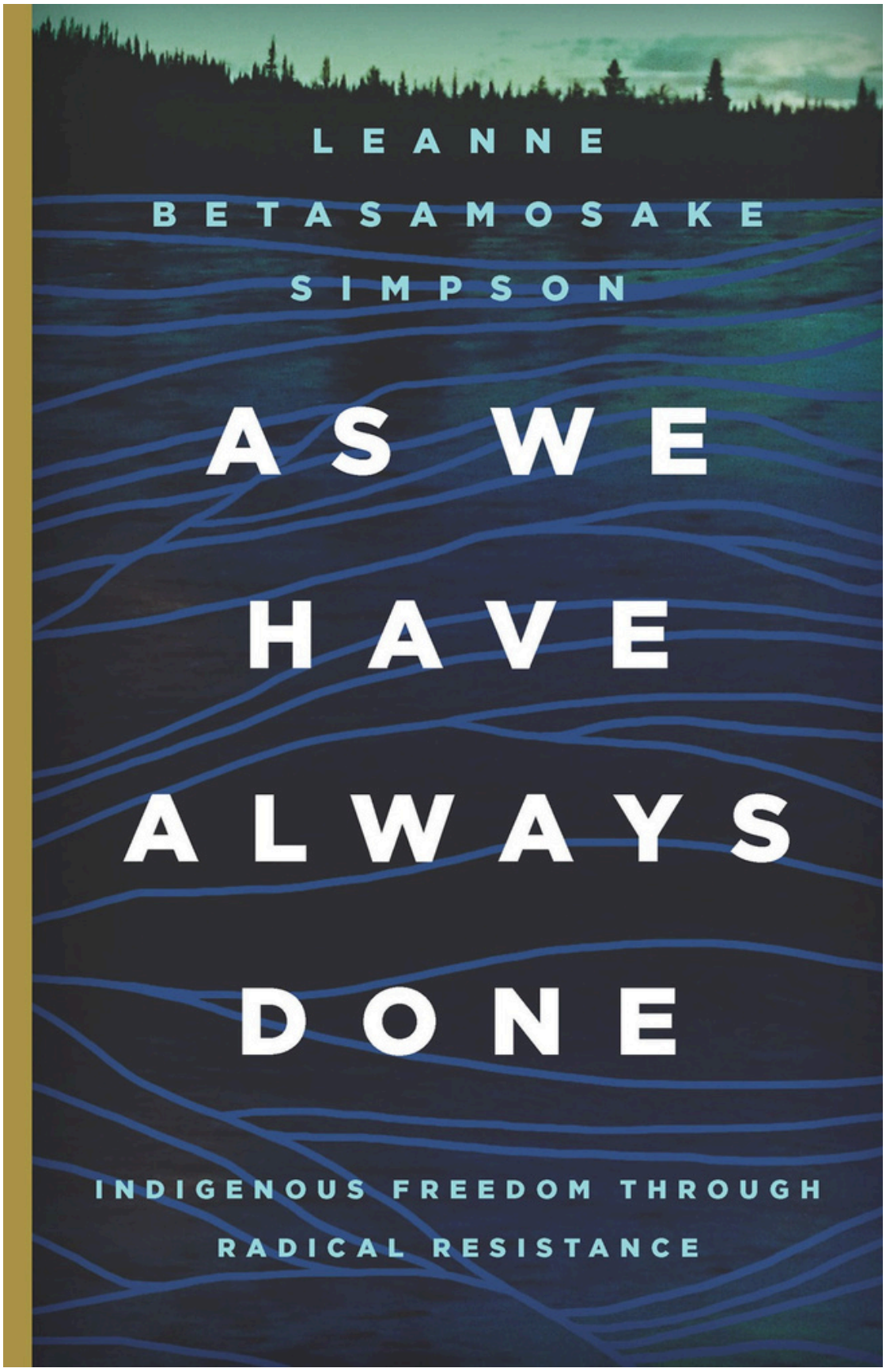
Another example of resistance to gender and sexual norms in Palestinian society is the September -□0; article by Abdullah Hassan Erikat, who was a college student in the West Bank when his article was published in the widely-read Palestinian magazine *# is Week in Palestine*. Erikat’s piece, titled

"Coming Out as Grey," boldly and bravely pushed back at the "list of slurs" he has endured in Arabic from fellow Palestinians for not conforming to an "ideal masculinity."ffl 4 ese include "*Fa$, Tant* = sissy; *Luti* = faggot in the most insulting way, more professionally it means queer; *Nua'om, banoteh* = womanly."ffl& Erikat writes, "My voice, body language, *nuomeh* (so! ness), and choice of clothes are inconsistent with the masculine pattern that each 'penis- born human' should adopt instinctively without claiming any di6 erence that is not in line with this pattern."fflfh Erikat also defends "women and LGBT peo- ple" and 9 ghts "the monster of the masculine paradigm" in Palestinian soci- ety.fflffl Erikat's article, and the emotions and struggle that it captures, are yet another form of queer resistance in Palestine.

Several months later, Erikat published another article in which he narrated the experience of being told as a seventh grader: "4 is is how your future looks like." 4 e friend who said that referred to a well-known man in their hometown who cross-dressed. Erikat was puzzled for years about why the fact that he did not reinforce Palestinian masculinity marked him so early and negatively in his society, a society that he describes as "worshipping" the gender binary.ffl He adds,

> Palestine needs to stop wearing the shadows of its historical struggle with Israeli occupation, which people are submerged in and which links it directly with masculinity, thus tightening the ././. rope. Our Palestinian-Israeli con5 ict and the continuing occupation is a tragic reality, yet people adopt it as an excuse not to allow any other social issues to be tackled as they prefer not to be distracted.ffl8

Erikat continues to write and speak openly and boldly about these queer issues and his personal experience. He has been an inspiration, especially to many other young queer Palestinians in the West Bank.


LEANNE
BETASAMOSAKE
SIMPSON
AS WE
HAVE
ALWAYS
DONE
INDIGENOUS FREEDOM THROUGH
RADICAL RESISTANCE

NINE

LAND AS PEDAGOGY

I've spent a lot of time each March in the sugar bush. The practice of harvesting sap and making maple syrup has been a foundational experience for me and my family. The following Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg story was told to me by Doug Williams. This is my own retelling of it, and it is one of the ways I tell it in March, when my family and I are in the sugar bush, making maple syrup. This story has been published by various authors over the years.. I have told different versions over the years. Nearly every time I tell it, I understand new meanings and make new connections.

The main character in this version of the story is Binoojiinh. Binoojiinh means child. Previous versions of this story have the main character as a boy and a girl.0 This story is republished here with the main character a gender- nonconforming child choosing to use the pronouns *they* and *their*. This changes the context of the story. I am repeating this story here deliberately to make the point that it is crucial we tell stories in a way that draws every member of our community into the stories, and to demonstrate the intelligence we all miss when we continue to uphold the colonial gender binary.

Nibble, nibble suck. Nibble, nibble suck. Nibble, nibble,
suck. Nibble, nibble, suck.

MMMMMMMMmmmmmm.

This stu/ tastes good.
It's real, sweet water.
MMMMmmmmmmmmmm.

Then Binoojiinh gets thinking

and they make a hole in that tree
and they make a little slide for
that sweet water to run down
they make a quick little container
out of birch bark, and
they collect that sweet water
and they take that sweet water home
to show their mama.

That doodoom is excited and they have three hundred

questions:

"Ah Binoojiinh, what is this?"

"Where did you 2nd it?"
"Which tree?"
"Who taught you how to make it?"
"Did you put semaa?"
"Did you say miigwech?"
"How fast is it dripping?"
"Does it happen all day?"
"Does it happen all night?"
"Where's the 2rewood?"

Binoojiinh tells their doodoom the story,

She believes every word
because they are her Binoojiinh
and they love each other very much.
"Let's cook the meat in it tonight,
it will be lovely sweet."

“Nahow.” “Nahow.”

So they cooked that meat in that sweet water

it was lovely sweet
it was extra lovely sweet
it was even sweeter than just that sweet water.

-e next day, Binoojiinh takes their mama

to that tree and their mama brings Kokum
and Kokum brings all the Aunties, and
there is a very big crowd of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabe-

kwewag
and there is a very big lot of pressure
Binoojiinh tells about Ajidamoo
Binoojiinh does the nibble nibble suck part.

At 2rst there are technical di4culties

and none of it works.
but Mama rubs Binoojiinh’s back
she tells Binoojiinh that she believes them anyway
they talk about lots of variables like heat and temperature

and time
then Giizis comes out and warms everything up
and soon its drip, drip, drip, drip.
those Aunties go crazy
Saasaakwe!
dancing around
hugging a bit too tight
high- kicking
and high- fiving
until they take it back home
boil it up
boil it down
into sweet, sweet sugar.

Ever since, every Ziigwan

those Michi Saagiig Nishnaabekwewag

collect that sweet water
and boil it up
and boil it down
into that sweet, sweet sugar
all thanks to Binoojiinh and their lovely discovery,
and to Ajidamoo and her precious teaching
and to Ninaatigoog and their boundless sharing.

Given Lovingly to Us by the Spirits

Nishnaabe scholar Wendy Makoons Geniusz translates the word *gaa- izhi- zhaawendaagoziyaang* as "given lovingly to us by the spirits." This describes the gift of maple sap and the process of making sugar so perfectly. This spring, while tapping a stand of maple trees, I remembered that the story of Binoojiinh is one of my favorite stories. It's one of my favorites because nothing violent happens in it. At every turn, Binoojiinh is met with very basic, core Nishnaabeg values—love, compassion, and understanding. They center their day around their own freedom and joy. I imagine myself at age seven running through a stand of maples with the first warmth of spring marking my cheeks. I imagine everything good in the world. My heart, my mind, and my spirit are open and engaged, and I feel as if I could accomplish anything. I imagine myself grasping at feelings I haven't felt before, that maybe life is so good that it is too short, that there really isn't enough time to love everything.

In reality, I have to image myself in this situation because as a child, I don't think I was ever in a similar situation. My experience of education from kindergarten to graduate school was one of coping with someone else's agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy, someone who was not interested in my well-being as a girl, my connection to my homeland, my language or history, or my Nishnaabeg intelligence. No one ever asked me what I was interested in, nor did they ask for my consent to participate in their system. My experience of education was one of continually being measured against a set of principles that required surrender to an assimilative colonial agenda in order to fulfill those

principles. I distinctly remember being in grade three at a class trip to the sugar bush and the teacher showing us two methods of making maple syrup: the pioneer method, which involved a black pot over an open 2re and clean sap, and the “Indian method,” which involved a hollowed- out log in an unlit fire with large rocks in the log to heat the sap up— sap that had bark, insects, dirt, and scum. The teacher asked us which method we would use, and being the only Native kid in the class, I was the only one who chose the “Indian method.”

-ings are different for this Binoojiinh. They have already spent seven years immersed in a nest of Nishnaabeg intelligence. -ey already understand the importance of observation and learning from our animal teachers when they watch the squirrel so carefully and then mimic its actions. They understand embodiment and conceptual thought when they then take this observation and apply it to their own situation— by making a cut in the maple tree and using a cedar shunt. They rely upon their own creativity to invent new technology. They patiently wait for the sap to collect. They take that sap home and share it with their family. -eir mother, in turn, meets her child’s discovery with love and trust. Binoojiinh watches as their mama uses the sap to boil the deer meat for supper. When they taste the deer and the sweetness, they learn about reduction, and when their mama and they go to clean the pot, they learn about how sap can be boiled into sugar. Binoojiinh then takes their elders to the tree, already trusting that they will be believed, that their knowledge and discovery will be cherished, and that they will be heard.

Binoojiinh learned a tremendous amount over a two- day period— self- led, driven by both their own curiosity and their own personal desire to learn. They learned to trust themselves, their family, and their community. They learned the sheer joy of discovery. They learned how to interact with the spirit of the maple. They learned both *!om* the land and *with* the land. -ey learned what it felt like to be recognized, seen, and appreciated by their community. They *came to know* maple sugar with the support of their family and elders. They come to know maple sugar in the context of love.

To me, this is what coming into wisdom within a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg epistemology looks like. It takes place in the context of family, community, and relation. It lacks overt co- ercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream, Western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued. The land, Aki, is both context and process. The process of coming to know is learner led and profoundly spiritual in nature. Coming to know is the pursuit of whole- body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, and when realized collectively, it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self- determining, interdependent, and self- regulating community- minded individuals. It creates communities of individuals with the capacity to uphold and move forward our political practices and systems of governance.

I am using Binoojiinh's story here in the same way it is used within Nishnaabeg intelligence, as a theoretical anchor whose layered and diverse meanings are revealed over time and space within individual and collective Nishnaabeg consciousness. A "theory" in its simplest form is an explanation of a phenomenon, and Nishnaabeg stories in this way form part of the theoretical basis of our intelligence. But theory also works a little di/erently within Nishnaabeg thought. "Theory" is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people. -e- ory isn't just an intellectual pursuit. It is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion. It is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for 2nding and generating meaning within their own lives.

Most important, theory isn't just for academics; it's for everyone, and so the story of maple sugar gets told to (some of) our kids almost from birth. Theory within this context is generated from the ground up, and its power stems from its living resonance within individuals and collectives. Younger citizens might 2rst just understand the literal meaning. As they grow, they can put together the conceptual meaning, and with more experience with our knowledge system, the metaphorical meaning.

-en they start to apply the processes and practices of the story in their own lives (when I have a problem, I'll call my aunties or my grandparents), and "meaning- making becomes an inside phenomenon." After they live each stage of life through the story, they then can communicate their lived wisdom through six or seven decades of lived experience and shifting meaning. This is how our old people teach. They are our geniuses because they know that wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we're all better when we're able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves.8 Stories direct, inspire, and a4rm an ancient code of ethics. If you do not know what it means to be intelligent within Nishnaabeg realities, then you can't see the epistemology, the pedagogy, the conceptual meaning, or the metaphor, or how this story has references to other parts of our oral tradition, or how this story is fundamentally, like all of our stories, communicating different interpretations and realizations of an Nishnaabeg worldview.

It is critical to avoid the assumption that this story takes place in precolonial times because Nishnaabeg conceptualizations of time and space present an ongoing intervention to linear thinking. This story happens in various incarnations all over our territory every year in March when the Nishnaabeg return to the sugar bush. Binoojiinh's presence (and the web of kinship relations that they are composed of) is complicated by their fraught relationality to the tenacity of settler colonialism,: and their very presence simultaneously shatters the disappearance of Indigenous women and girls and Two Spirit and queer people from settler consciousness. They also escape the rigidity of colonial gender binaries by having influence and agency within their family, while physically disrupting settler colonial com- modi2cation and ownership of the land through the implicit assumption that they are supposed to be there. -eir existence as a hub of intelligent Nishnaabeg relationality may be threatened by land the3, environmental contamination, residential schools and state- run education, and colonial gender violence, but Binoojiinh is there anyway, making maple sugar as they have always done, in a loving compassionate reality, propelling us to

re- create the circumstances within which this story and Nishnaabewin takes place. Propelling us to rebel against the permanence of settler colonial reality and not just "dream alternative realities" but to create them, on the ground in the physical world in spite of being occupied. If we accept colonial permanence, then our rebellion can only take place within settler colonial thought and reality, and we also become too willing to sacri- 2ce the context that creates and produces cultural workers like Binoojiinh. What if Binoojiinh had accepted the permanence of settler colonialism as an unmovable reality?

What if Binoojiinh had no access to the sugar bush because of land dispossession, environmental contamination, or global climate change?

What if they were too depressed or anxiety ridden from being erased from Canadian society, removed from their language and homeland, and targeted as a "squaw" or a "drunken Indian." Or too depressed or anxiety ridden from being bullied for not neatly 2tting into the colonial gender binary?

What if the trauma and pain of ongoing colonial gendered violence had made it impossible for their mama to believe them, or for their mama to reach out and so gently rub their lower back at that critical point? What if that same trauma and pain prevented their aunties and elders from gathering around them and supporting them when there were technical di4culties? What if settler- colonial parenting strategies positioned the child as "less believable" than an adult?

What if Binoojiinh had been in a desk at a school that didn't honor at its core their potential within Michi Saagiig Nish- naabeg intelligence? Or if they had been in an educational con- text where having an open heart was a liability instead of a gi3? What if they had not been running around, exploring, experi- menting, observing the squirrel . . . completely engaged in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg ways of knowing? What if they hadn't been on the land at all?

What if Binoojiinh lived in a world where no one listened to trans kids? Or where they had been missing or murdered before they ever made it out to the sugar bush?

It Comes *through* the Land

For me,thisstory isacritical intervention into current thinking about Indigenous education, because Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual practices unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes.10 To re- create the world that compelled Binoojiinh to learn how to make maple sugar, we should be concerned with re- creating the conditions within which this learning occurred, not just the content of the practice itself. Setters easily appropriate and reproduce the content of the story every year when they make commercial maple syrup in the context of capitalism, but they completely miss the wisdom that underlies the entire process because they deterritorialize the mechanics of maple syrup production from Nishnaabeg intelligence, and from Aki. #ey appropriated and recast the process within a hyperindividualism that negates relationality. #e radical thinking and action of this story are not so much in the mechanics of reducing maple sap to sugar but lie in the reproduction of a loving web of Nishnaabeg networks within which learning takes place.

For countless generations, Nishnaabeg children grew up within the milieu of Nishnaabewin, not the institution of school. Many of our children still do, thanks to parents, grandparents, and communities. Like governance and leadership and every other aspect of reciprocated life, education comes from the roots up. It comes from being enveloped by land. An individual's intimate relationship with the spiritual and physical elements of creation is at the center of a learning journey that is lifelong.11 You can't graduate from Nishnaabewin; it is a gi$ to be practiced and reproduced. And while each individual must have the skills and knowledge to ensure their own safety, survival, and prosperity in both the physical and spiritual realm, their existence is ultimately dependent upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty, and respect with all elements of creation, including plants and animals.

Nishnaabeg- Gikendaasowin, or Nishnaabeg knowledge,

originates in the spiritual realm, coming to individuals through dreams, visions, and ceremony and through the process of gaa-izhi- zhaawendaagoziyaang— that which is given lovingly to us by the spirits..This makes sense because this is the place where our Ancestors reside, where spiritual beings exist, and where the spirits of living plants, animals, and humans interact. To gain access to this knowledge, one has to align oneself within with the forces of the implicate order through ceremony, ritual, and the embodiment of the teachings one already carries..1

Within this system there is no standard curriculum because it is impossible to generate a curriculum for "that which is given to us lovingly from the spirits," and because it doesn't make sense for everyone to master the same body of factual information. Nishnaabeg society in its fullest realization requires a diver- sity of excellence to continue to produce an abundance of sup- portive relationships. Within the context of humility and agency, decisions about learning are in essence an agreement between individuals and the spirit world. Nishnaabewin fosters and cher- ishes individuals with particular gi3s and skills as a mechanism for growing diversity, and childhood is an excellent time for in- dividuals to focus in on those particular gifts and hone them into excellence. Just as it is unthinkable within an Nishnaabeg world- view for a leader to impose their will on their people, it is un- thinkable to impose an agenda onto another living thing—i n es- sence the *context is the curriculum,* and land, Aki, is the context..5

In addition to the land (including the spiritual world), the context for Nishnaabewin is profoundly intimate. Gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang requires long-term, stable, balanced warm relationships within the family, extended family, the community, and all living aspects of creation. Intelligence ;ows through relationships between living entities. Gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang requires love, the word *zhaawen,* a part of the word *Gaa- izhi- zhaawendaagoziyaang,* means to have complete "compassion for another in one's thoughts and mind. It has a connotation of bestowing kindness, mercy, and aid. It includes ideas of pity, empathy and deep unconditional love.".6 Nishnaabeg scholar John Borrows explains:

> For instance, my friend Kekek notes that zhawenjige is another derivation of zhawenim. It means to hunt. We hear the word used in hunting and harvesting songs. When we sing zhawenim izhichige it means “you will be pitied, or have mercy placed upon you in your actions and what you are doing.” -e idea behind this word is that when we acknowledge our relations with the world, and our responsibilities to each other, then we will all be blessed or 2nd love and compassion. We will be nourished, sustained and taken care of. -e idea of zhawenjige is said to be part of an old treaty the Nishnaabeg made with the animals. As long as we love them they will provide for us, and teach us about love and how to live well in the world..7

Meaning, then, is derived not through content or data or even theory in a Western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are di/erent and valuable because of di/erence. Individuals carry the responsibility for generating meaning within their own lives; they carry the responsibility for engaging their minds, bodies, and spirits in a practice of generating meaning. Within Nishnaabewin, I am responsible for my thoughts and ideas. I am responsible for my own interpretations, and thus you’ll always hear from our elders what appears to be qualifying their teachings with statements that position them as learners, position their ideas as their own understandings, and place their teachings within the context of their own lived experience. -is is deliberate, ethical, and *profoundly* careful within Nishnaabewin because to do otherwise is considered arrogant and intrusive with the potential to interfere with other beings’ life pathways..8 Although individuals have the responsibility to self- actualize within this system, intelligence in this context is not an individual’s property to own. So once an individual has carried a particular teaching to the point where they can easily embody that teaching, they also then become responsible for sharing it according to the ethics and protocols of the system. -is is primarily done by modeling.

Continually generating meaning is often, but not exclusive- ly, done in ceremony and involves ongoing ethical systems of accountability and responsibility, particularly for emotional trauma and healing..9 Individual generated meaning is an authentic and grounded power. These meanings in all of their diversity then become the foundation of generated collective meanings and a plurality of truths..: This collective process, operationalized within Nishnaabeg political practices, for example, generates a series of collective meanings, including dissension, that make sense within broad and multiple interpretations of Nishnaabeg values and philosophies.

Nishnaabeg Intelligence Is Diversity

-ere are unseen forces or spiritual elements that hold power and in;uence in the story of maple sugar that are only alluded to within the narrative at least in part because older Nishnaabeg teachers culturally talk about these things as if they are sitting beside us in a room, rather than coming directly at them.0. -ere is an implicit assumption in this story that Binoojiinh o/ered tobacco to the maple tree before they cut the bark to collect the sap. -ey do this as a mechanism to set up a relationship with the maple tree that is based on mutual respect, reciprocity, and caring. By placing the tobacco down, they are speaking directly to the spirit of the maple tree. I understand it as their spirit speaking directly to the spirit of the maple tree, entering into a balanced relationship of mutuality. -e maple tree does not have to produce sap for Binoojiinh; the tree has agency over this act. Binoojiinh also has agency; they have chosen to act in a way that aligns themselves with actions their people know promote more life and interconnection within Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogamig.00 -ere are also several other spiritual interactions involved in this story of lovingly coming to know: the spirit of the squirrel, the spirits of their family that supported them, and the spirits of their Ancestors. Within an Nishnaabeg epistemology, spiritual knowledge is a tremendous, ubiquitous source of wisdom that is the core of every system in the physical world. -e implicate order provides the stories that answer all of our questions. And the way we are taught to access that knowledge is

by being open to that kind of knowledge and by being engaged in a way of living that generates a close, personal relationship with our Ancestors and relations in the spirit world through ceremony, dreams, visions, and stories. -e implicate order does not discriminate by gender, by age, by ability, or by any of those things. The implicate order only cares if you believe, if you're living your life in an engaged way. If we are open to this, then knowledge will show through us based on our own actions, on our name, clan, and helpers, and on our own self- actualization, as long as we uphold these responsibilities.

Binoojiinh already lives in a reality where the spiritual world has tremendous presence in each moment. Binoojiinh is a vessel of resurgence. -ey are a leader. They embody the core teachings and philosophies of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg culture. -ey paid attention to our creation story— the one that says Nishnaabewin have both intellectual knowledge and heart knowledge, the one that says you have to be fully present in all aspects of your physical and spiritual body to access the gi3 of knowledge from the spiritual world.01 Binoojiinh very clearly represents this kind of citizen capable of upholding the tenets of our nation in spite of settler colonialism. -ey are in essence the goal of community: the re- creation of beings that continu- ally live lives promoting the continuous rebirth of life itself.05 In the context of Nishnaabeg resurgence—t he rebuilding of Indig- enous nations according to our own political, intellectual, and cultural practices—we need to reestablish the context for creat- ing a society of Binoojiinh because we need to re- create a soci- ety of individuals who can think and live inside the multiplicity of our culture and our intelligence.

This presents Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg people with a critical task. If we do not create a generation of people attached to the land and committed to living out our culturally inherent ways of coming to know, we risk losing what it means to be Nishnaabeg within our own thought systems. We simply cannot bring about the resurgence of our nations if we have no one that can think within the emergent networks of Nishnaabeg intelligence. We cannot bring about the kind of radical transformation

we seek if we are solely reliant upon state- sanctioned and state-run education systems. We cannot carry out the kind of decolonization our Ancestors set in motion if we don't create a generation of land- based, community- based intellectuals and cultural producers who are accountable to our nations and whose life work is concerned with the regeneration of these systems rather than meeting the overwhelming needs of the Western academic industrial complex or attempting to "Indigenize the academy" by bringing Indigenous Knowledge into the academy on the terms of the academy itself. Our Ancestors' primary concern in "educating" our young people was to nurture a new generation of elders— of land- based intellectuals— philosophers, theorists, medicine people, and historians who embodied Nishnaabeg intelligence in whatever time they were living in because they had lived their lives through Nishnaabeg intelligence.

They embodied Nishnaabeg intelligence because they were *practitioners* of Nishnaabeg intelligence.

Nishnaabeg intelligence has been violently under attack since the beginning days of colonialism through processes that remove Indigenous peoples from our homelands, whether those processes are education in residential and other forms of state-run schools, outright dispossession, the destruction of land through resource extraction and environmental contamination, imposed poverty, heteropatriarchy, or colonial gendered violence. Our peoples have always resisted this destruction by engaging in Nishnaabewin whenever and wherever they could. I would not exist and be writing this chapter today if it were not for the physical survival of several generations of Nishnaabeg women in my family and the heartbreaking sacri2ces of my elders in resisting colonial educational practices in their commitment to teaching others, the vast majority of the time in the absence of compensation or deep reciprocity, and outside of the provincial education and the postsecondary education system. Not one time has an elder told me to go to school to learn Indigenous Knowledge. Not one time has an elder told me to go and get a degree so that I can pass Indigenous Knowledge down to my children, yet we place tremendous pressure on our youth to gain

Western academic credentials. -is seems highly problematic to me because we desperately need a new generation of thinkers who are articulate and brilliant from within Nishnaabewin, a generation that can think within our philosophies and enact those philosophies as a living and breathing imposition to colonialism, as every generation has done in some capacity before us. Otherwise we risk losing being Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. To create a nation of Binoojiinh— to survive *as Nishnaabeg*— we shouldn't be just striving for land- based pedagogies. -e land must once again *become* the pedagogy.

Intelligence as Consensual Engagement

Binoojiinh very clearly embodied the idea of land as pedagogy as they went about their day learning with and from maple trees, among many other beings. Binoojiinh had already grown up in a community where the adult practitioners of Nishnaabeg intelligence were teaching them through modeling how to interact with all elements of creation. So on one hand, Binoojiinh was just doing what they had seen the adults in their life do every day over and over again in a variety of di/erent activities. On a deeper level, Binoojiinh was also teaching us by "modeling"; their story aligns itself with our embodied theory, our Creation stories.

Gzhwe Manidoo in the very beginning of the cosmos and in the continual creation of Nishnaabeg ontology, axiology, and epistemology set up the context for Nishnaabeg reality.06 -at context was the earth Gzhwe Manidoo created, and as we know by now, Nishnaabeg conceptualizations of Aki are at their core profoundly relational. Borrows explains it this way:

> The Nishnaabeg have long taken direction about how we should live through our interactions and observations with the environment. People regulate their behavior and resolve their disputes by drawing guidance from what they see in the behavior of the sun, moon, stars, winds, waves, trees, birds, animals, and other natural phenomenon. -e Nishnaabeg word for this concept is

> gikinawaabiwin. We can also use the word akinoomaage, which is formed from two roots: Aki: noomaage. “Aki” means earth and “noomaage” means to point towards and take direction from. As we draw analogies from our surroundings, and appropriately apply or distinguish what we see, we learn about how to love, and how we should live in our lands.07

Aki includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, and energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies, and networks that connect these elements. Knowledge in akinoomaage ;ows through the layered spirit world above the earth, the place where spiritual beings reside and the place where our Ancestors sit.08 In the Nishnaabeg creation stories told and discussed in *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back,* the process in which Gzhwe Manidoo created the world is the process by which Nishnaabeg people come to know. Coming to know is a mirroring or a reenactment process where we understand Nishnaabeg epistemology to be concerned with embodied knowledge animated, collective, and lived out in a way in which our reality, nationhood, and existence are continually reborn through both time and space. -is requires a joining of both emotional knowledge and intellectual knowledge in a profoundly personal and intimate spiritual context. Coming to know is an intimate, unfolding process of relationship with the spiritual world.

Coming to know also requires complex, committed, *consensual* engagement. Relationships within Nishnaabewin are based upon the consent—the informed (honest) consent— of all beings involved. -e word *consensual* here is key because if children learn to normalize dominance and nonconsent within the context of education, then nonconsent becomes part of the normalized tool kit of those with authoritarian power. Within the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples are not seen as worthy recipients of consent, informed or otherwise, and part of being colonized is engaging in all kinds of processes daily that given a choice, we likely wouldn’t consent to. In my experience

of the state- run education system, my informed consent was never required. Learning was forced on me using the threat of emotional and physical violence. In postsecondary education, consent was coercive: if you want these credentials, this is what you have to do, and this is what you have to endure.09 -is is unthinkable within Nishnaabeg intelligence. In fact, if there isn't a considerable amount of demonstrated interest and commitment on the part of the learner, learning doesn't occur at all. Raising Indigenous children in a context where their consent, physical and intellectual, is not just required but valued goes a long way to undoing the replication of colonial gender violence.

In the context of resurgence, which is in essence an emergent process mitigated by spiritual forces, physical and intellectual *engagement* with the struggle of nation building within speci2c cultural contexts is the only way to generate new knowledge. Being engaged— deeply and consensually—in the physical, real- world work of resurgence, movement building, and nation building is the only way to generate new knowledge on how to resurge from within Nishnaabeg intellectual systems. We cannot just think, write, or imagine our way to a decolonized future. Answers to how to rebuild and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment. Intellectual knowledge is not enough on its own. Neither is spiritual knowledge or emotional knowledge. All kinds of knowledge are important and necessary in a communal and emergent balance.

This creation story also emphasizes that Nishnaabeg people embody all the necessary knowledge for resurgence. We are enough because if we are living our lives out in an Nishnaabeg way (as many of us are), we can access all the knowledge that went into creating the universe. In my experience as an Nishnaabeg person in the context of centuries of gendered violence and ongoing occupation of my homeland, part of my knowledge base is a critical attunement to settler colonialism and generated theories of resistance as well as resurgence and liberation, both coming from within my own knowledge system and through

the sharing of the liberatory politics of Indigenous peoples and people of color who have also been forced to live through oppression. Aki is also liberation and freedom— my freedom to establish and maintain relationships of deep reciprocity within a pristine homeland my Ancestors handed down to me. Aki is encompassed by freedom, freedom that is protected by sovereignty and actualized by self- determination.

Once this context is reestablished, even if it begins as only a dream or a vision, even held just by a few individuals, the fetishization of theoretical approaches to realize that context becomes counterproductive.0: If Dionne Brand or Fred Moten speaks to my heart as an Nishnaabekwe, as both do, then Nishnaabeg intelligence compels me to learn, share, and embody everything I can from every teacher that presents themselves to me in a mutually ethical, consensual, and reciprocal way. Nishnaabeg intelligence *is* diversity—Nishnaabeg intelligence *as* diversity.1=

Nanabush. Period.

Nanabush is widely regarded within Nishnaabeg thought as an important teacher because Nanabush mirrors human behavior and models how to (and how not to) come to know. I think it's important to point out that Nanabush does not teach at a university, nor is Nanabush a teacher within the state school system. Nanabush also doesn't read academic papers or write for academic journals. Nanabush is fun, entertaining, sexy, and playful. You're more likely to 2nd Nanabush dancing on a table at a bar than at an academic conference. If Nanabush had gone to teachers' college, Nanabush would have been 2red in the 2rst three months of his 2rst teaching gig.1. -is is precisely why Nanabush is an outstanding teacher. Nanabush not only teaches me self- compassion for the part of me that may dance on bars in celebration of life and love and all things good, but Nanabush comes with inevitable contradictions held within the lives of the occupied. Nanabush also continually shows us what happens when we are not responsible for our own baggage or trauma or emotional responses. -e brilliance of Nanabush is that Nanabush stories the land with a sharp criticality necessary for

moving through the realm of the colonized into the dreamed reality of the decolonized, and for navigating the lived reality of having to engage with both at the same time.

In the spirit of Nanabush, part of me is being facetious in that last paragraph, and part of me is not. -e academic industrial complex does not and cannot provide the proper context for Nishnaabeg intelligence without the full, valued recognition of the context within which Nishnaabeg intelligence manifests itself: the *practice* of Aki— freedom, sovereignty, and self-determination over bodies, minds, and land. -e academy does not and cannot provide the proper context for Nishnaabeg intelligence without taking a principled stand on the forces that are currently attacking Nishnaabeg intelligence: colonial gendered violence, dispossession, erasure, and imposed poverty. The academy does not and cannot provide the proper context for Nishnaabeg intelligence without the full recognition of the system that generates this intelligence and the people who have dedicated their lives to growing, nurturing, and living that system— our elders and knowledge holders. -e academy does not and cannot provide the proper context for Nishnaabeg intelligence without fully funding the regeneration of Indigenous thinkers as a matter of restitution for the damage it has caused and continues to cause the Indigenous Knowledge system through centuries of outright attack.10

I imagine myself talking about postsecondary education with Nanabush right now, and he immediately asking me why I think spending sixty hours a week indoors in a classroom or on a computer is Indigenous education at all. Point taken. I've just spent several hours writing all of this down when my Ancestors have always understood this, and in fact, I think my kids understand most of it. Several Nishnaabeg elders are embodying all of these teachings right now, and any Indigenous person with motivation to learn to think inside the land should be interacting with their own elders and experts in their own homelands instead of reading me. So while I could ask Nanabush what Nishnaabeg education is, I'd have to be ready for him to ;ip the table. He's not known for his patience, for one thing, and for another,

he's spent eternity trying to demonstrate that with his own life. It's not Nanabush's fault we aren't paying attention.
One person who is paying attention is Binoojiinh, because in going back to the sugar bush, Binoojiinh models their day on an important Nanabush story. Shortly a3er the creation of the world and the birth of Nanabush, Nanabush took a trip around the world as a way of learning about the world. -at's the 2rst lesson. If you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it. Get a practice.11 If you want to learn about movement building, get yourself outside involved with people that are building movements. -at doesn't mean don't read books or don't talk to people with all kinds of intelligences. It doesn't mean don't 2nd mentors. It does mean get out, get involved, and get invested. A3er Nanabush had completed his 2rst journey around the world, he embarked on a second journey around the world, this time with wolf as a companion. At this point, we should all recognize pretty clearly that the learning changes when the relational context changes. Nanabush did a tremendous amount of visiting on both of his trips— he visited with Nokomis, he visited with the West Wind, he visited with plants and animals, mountains, and bodies of water. Visiting within Nishnaabeg intelligence means sharing oneself through story, through principled and respectful consensual reciprocity with another living being. Visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and in the presence of compassion. Visiting is fun and enjoyable and nurtures the intimate connections and relationship building. Visiting is the core of our political system (leaders visiting with all the members of the community), our mobilization (Tkamse and Pontiac visited within and outside of their own nations for several years before they expected mobilization), and our intelligence (people visiting elders, sharing food, taking care). Binoojiinh knew this. -is is why they were visiting the maple tree in the 2rst place.

At several points in Nanabush's journey, Nanabush sought spiritual guidance through dreams, visions, and ceremonies. At one point he had to learn to build a canoe to cross a large body of water. He experimented until he figured it out. This was both

time consuming and frustrating. When he 2nally got a structure that would ;oat, he had no way to propel it. -is was also time consuming and frustrating. Eventually by calming down and watching a beaver, he was able to fashion a paddle inspired by the beaver's tail and continue across the body of water.

In this story, Nanabush models how to come to know for Binoojiinh. He *shows* us land as pedagogy, without yelling "LAND AS PEDAGOGY," or typing "land as pedagogy" into a computer 23y times. Sometimes when I am teaching PhD students, I say that in this story Nanabush is teaching us how to be students, teachers, and researchers. He is giving us theory and methodology, but it's really much bigger than that. Nanabush is teaching us how to be full human beings within the context of Nishnaabeg intelligence. Nishnaabeg intelligence is for everyone, not just students, teachers, and researchers. It's not just pedagogy, it's how to live life.

Resurgent Education

Being engaged in land as pedagogy as a life practice inevitably means coming face- to- face with settler colonial authority, surveillance, and violence, because this practice places Indigenous bodies in between settlers and their money.15 -e practices of hunting, 2shing, and living o/ the land within my territory have been a direct challenge to settler colonialism since 1?2A and the imposition of the Williams Treaty.16 Being a practitioner of land as pedagogy and learning in my community also mean learning how to resist this imposition. It's a process of learning how to be on the land anyway.

There are countless stories that I could tell here about settler surveillance, criminalization, and violence that occur on the land while Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg are engaged as practitioners in Nishnaabewin,17 but the story I want to leave you with is one that comes from someone who has invested greatly in my intelligence as an Nishnaabekwe.

Over the past 23een years or so, I have spent a large amount of time on the land learning from Doug Williams. Doug and I have hunted, fished, trapped, picked medicines, conducted cer-

emonies, harvested birch bark, made maple syrup, canoed ancient routes, and harvested wild rice throughout our territory. -is represents the most profound educational experience of my life, and I hope that it is far from over. During our extensive time on our land, Doug has taught me the history of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, an oral tradition passed down to him from his uncles, who would have learned it from their parents and grandparents. He has taught me the political practices of our people and the ceremonies, philosophies, and values they carried with them. He has taken me to every sacred site in our territory and has shared songs, seamlessly moving between the roles of best friend, father, and elder. He has patiently listened to me. He has patiently answered every question I've brought to him. He has told me hundreds of stories cataloging the 2erce resistance of our Ancestors to our way of life. He has healed me.

It is this relationship more than any other that has created in me the same 2erce resistance my Ancestors carried with them and that has fostered a responsibility in me to our territory. It is this relationship more than any other that has made me Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. Doug has invested more time in my spiritual, emotional, and intellectual education than anyone else in my life. Yet it is completely unrecognized, unsupported, and disregarded by academic institutions.

Being out on the land with Doug living our Michi Saagiig Nishnaabewin means we run up against colonial authorities regularly, whether that is the police, game wardens, or settlers providing their own homegrown surveillance for the settler colonial authorities. To be honest, most of this is fairly normalized, and unless there is a particular aggression or violence involved in the incident, I o3en don't even notice. But Doug reminds me continually through story that being tied to land also means being tied to an unwritten, unseen history of resistance:

> The 1923 Williams Treaty was devastating to my people.
>
> I witnessed the trauma and the fear that was put on my people that were trying to live on the land. -ey lived daily watching over their backs and trying to maintain

their lifestyle as Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. -e government with the implementation of the “basket clause” was a sneaky way to get rid of us as people who enjoyed this part of our great land.18 -ese old men I hung around with such as Madden and Jimkoons Taylor lived a life where they had to live by sneaking around and feeling like they were “poachers.” They resorted to catching other animals and harvesting those things that the government did not feel were part of the things they need to “protect” from us. These things included small animals, such as the groundhog and the porcupine; the muskrat for meat and other things were also eaten be- cause we were forbidden from hunting deer (which was our staple). Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg were also prohib- ited from 2shing from October 15 to July 1 every year under provincial statutes. These colonial restrictions were devastating to people that lived on the land. -ey posted game wardens in the tri- lakes area— Buckhorn, Chemong, and Pigeon— to enforce these restrictions. We faced starvation.

It was particularly difficult to obtain food in the wintertime, and since fishing was prohibited, it became a time of great su/ering. People had to run up an account at the Whetung General Store to tide them over until the muskrat season opened in April. So it was November to April that was quite difficult. Some people still had to fish and would do it at odd hours and would have to sneak around and not be seen. This is a very difficult thing to do in the winter. Anyone standing on the ice can be seen for miles, and this is what the game warden would look out for and go out and chase my people. -ere were many stories told of how my people escaped the game warden. -ere were many stories of our people being caught and going to court in Peterborough to be given fines for fishing out of season. Imagine the indignieity on our people when they came in front of the Canadian courts for being Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg in our own territory!

Our people were incredibly strong and resilient. We were able to survive even though we were forced to live in an undigni2ed way of living o/ the land. -ere is a story told of one of the young men— Shkiin, short for Shkiininini meaning “young man.” Shkiin had the ability to escape the game warden by putting on these skates you tied onto your feet. -e only problem was the skates had no brakes, so it was impossible to stop. One day, the game warden showed up with modern tube- type skates. He saw Shkiin fishing out on the ice, put on those speed- skating skates, and went after Shkiin. Shkiin tied on his skates and took o/. After awhile, the game warden start- ed to catch up. Shkiin thought, “uh oh I’m in trouble.” Just then he saw some open water. He thought he would skate as fast as he could and jump over the open water because he knew the game warden couldn’t follow. So he skated as fast as he could, took the leap— it was about twenty feet— and he made it. He landed, looked around, and the game warden had to put on the brakes. Shkiin turned around, waved at him, and gave him that Saasaakwe sound. -e old people used to tell about that story and how Shkiin became a legend in getting away from game wardens.

I admire the resilience of my people very much. One of the ways they kept up their spirit was with humor. Many stories are told of the klutzy game wardens that were posted on the lakes to watch out for us. -ere are also some sad stories. Old Sam Fawn a3er many years of carving axe handles, saving up money, and making other items like that. With his little bit of money he was able to a/ord a cedar- strip canoe from Peterborough. He went 2shing on Fox Island out of provincial season. He was seen by the game warden, who chased him. Sam beat him and came across from Fox Island to the mainland at Curve Lake. He put his canoe up on shore, turned it over, and walked home. Everyone did that back in those days. Everyone knew each other’s canoes. The game warden was watching him from Fox Island, and he

sneaked over and seized that canoe. -e canoe has never been seen again. Poor Sam Fawn, worked hard his whole life, trying to live o/ the land. I remember him as being one of the most gentle human beings that lived in Curve Lake. -e trauma created by the 1923 Williams Treaty will be long- lived. It lives in our hearts. -e govern- ment can never repay us for what the damage they have caused. -e damage is done. Many of the people that lived through this trauma have now passed on. I remem- ber them dearly, and I hope that somehow there are no game wardens in the Happy Hunting Grounds.

-is story serves as an important reminder: by far the largest attack on Indigenous Knowledge systems right now is land dispossession, and the people that are actively protecting Nishnaabewin are not those at academic conferences advocating for its use in research and course work, but those who are currently putting their bodies on the land. In many ways, the 2ght for Nishnaabewin is not taking place in parliament, on social media, or on the streets in urban centers; rather, it lies with communities like Grassy Narrows and those on the ground who are active practitioners of Nishnaabewin or who are actively protecting their lands from destruction.

When I was a PhD student at the University of Manitoba in the late 1??Bs, there was a considerable amount of discussion among academics on how to ethically and responsibly bring Indigenous Knowledge into the academy, as a way of legitimizing the knowledge of Indigenous peoples as an intellectual system on par with Western traditions, as a mechanism to attract Indigenous students to the academy, and as a means to preserve Indigenous Knowledge. An effort was made to produce more Indigenous scholars so they would have a stronger presence within the colonial system. When I 2rst held a tenure-t rack position in an Indigenous Studies department, there were two elders on faculty, both women, who had gained tenure on the basis of their expertise in Indigenous Knowledge, not on Western credentials. Fi3een years later the same university has no

tenured elders, only Indigenous and non- Indigenous academics primarily hired on the basis of Western credentials.
-e problem with this approach then and now is that it reinforces colonial authority over Nishnaabeg intelligence by keeping it rei2ed and fetishized within a settler colonial ap- proach to education designed only to propel settler colonial- ism. -is serves to reinforce asymmetrical power relationships between Indigenous Knowledge and Western knowledge, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It sets both Indigenous Knowledge holders and Indigenous learners up in a never- ending battle for recognition within that system, when the academy's primary intention is to use Indigenous peoples and our knowledge systems to legitimize settler colonial author- ity within education used as a training ground for those who would legitimize settler colonial authority over Indigenous peo- ples and our nations in Canadian society.

The thing for Nishnaabeg to do is to stop looking for legit- imacy within the colonizer's education system and return to valuing and recognizing our individual and collective intelli- gence on its own merits and on our own terms. Withdrawing our considerable collective e/orts to "Indigenize the academy" in favor of a resurgence of Indigenous intellectual systems and a reclamation of the context within which those systems operate goes much further toward propelling our nationhood and rees- tablishing Indigenous political systems because it places people back on the land in a context that is conducive to resurgence and mobilization. -e academy has continually refused to recognize and support the validity, legitimacy, rigor, and ethical principles of Nishnaabeg intelligence and the system itself, so we must stop begging for recognition and do this work for ourselves. -is co- lonial refusal should be met with Indigenous refusal— refusal to struggle simply for better or more inclusion and recognition within the academic industrial complex.5. As Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes state in their discussion of decolonial aesthetics, "-is means the task of decolonial artists, scholars and activists is not simply to o/er amendments or edits to the current world, but to display the mutual sacri2ce and relationality needed to

sabotage colonial systems of thought and power for the purpose of liberatory alternatives.50 -is is true in politics, art, cultural and intellectual production, and education because these systems are seamlessly woven together within our intelligence. If the academy is concerned about not only protecting and maintaining Indigenous intelligence but also revitalizing it on Indigenous terms as a form of restitution for its historic and contemporary role as a colonizing force (of which I see no evidence), then the academy must make a conscious decision to become a decolonizing force in the intellectual lives of Indigenous peoples by joining us in dismantling settler colonialism and actively protecting the source of our knowledge: Indigenous *land*.

I am not saying that Indigenous peoples should forgo learn- ing Western-based skills altogether, but we currently have a situation where our greatest minds, our children and youth, are spending forty hours a week in state- run education systems from age four to twenty- two if they complete an undergradu- ate degree. Next to none of that takes place in an Nishnaabeg context, and although many Indigenous parents and families do everything they can do to ensure their children are connected to their homelands, this should be the center of the next generation's lives, not the periphery. To foster expertise within Nishnaabeg intelligence, we need people engaged with land as curriculum and in our languages for decades, not weeks. Shouldn't we as communities support and nurture children who choose to educate themselves only within Nishnaabewin? Wouldn't this create a strong generation of elders? Don't we deserve learning spaces where we do not have to address state learning objectives, curriculum, credentialism, and careerism, where our only concern for recognition comes from within? Are the state- run education system and the academic industrial complex really a house worth inhabiting?

Nishnaabewin did not and does not prepare children for successful career paths in a hypercapitalistic system. It is designed to create self- motivated, self- directed, community- minded, interdependent, brilliant, loving citizens who at their core uphold our ideals around family, community, and nationhood by valu-

ing their intelligences, their diversity, their desires and gi3s, and their lived experiences. It encourages children to 2nd their joy and place it at the center of their lives. It encourages children to value consent. -is was the key to building nations where exploitation was unthinkable. But don't our children have to live in a hypercapitalistic system? Well yes, and if we are going to survive this as Nishnaabeg, we need to create generations of people who are capable of actualizing radical decolonization, diversity, transformation, and local economic alternatives to capitalism. The beauty of culturally inherent resurgence is that it challenges settler colonial dissections of our territories and our bodies into reserve/city or rural/urban dichotomies. All Canadian cities are on Indigenous lands. Indigenous presence is attacked in all geographies. In reality, the majority of Indigenous peoples move regularly through reserves, cities, towns, and rural areas. We have found ways to connect to the land and our stories and to live our intelligences no matter how urban or how destroyed our homelands have become. While it is critical that we grow and nurture a generation of people who can think within the land and have tremendous knowledge and connection to Aki, this doesn't have to take away from the contributions of urban Indigenous communities to our collective resurgence. Cities have becomes sites of tremendous activism and resistance and of artistic, cultural, and linguistic revival and regeneration, and this comes from the land. Whether urban or rural, city or reserve, the shi3 that Indigenous systems of intelligence compel us to make is one from capitalistic consumer to cultural producer. Radical resurgent education is therefore at the heart of the Radical Resurgence Project because it rebelliously replicates nation- based Indigeneity. Binoojiinh reminds me that "the freedom realized through ;ight and refusal is the freedom to imagine and create an elsewhere in the here; a present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism. It is a per- formance of other worlds, an embodied practice of ;ight." For me, Binoojiinh as fugitive to within provides the 2re, the compassion, and the loving rebellion to do just that.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

Somais an Indo-Iranian ritual drink made from pressing particular psychedelic and energizing plants together. In Vedic and Zoroastrian traditions the drink is identified with the divine. The word Soma is derived from the Sanskrit and Indo-European tongues meaning "to press and be newly born." Somatic is derived from the Greek, meaning the body. In different medical disciplines it can mean different things, from a cell or tissue, or to the part of the nervous system that controls sensations and movements. My idea for a (Soma)tic Poetics is a poetry which investigates that seemingly infinite space between body and spirit by using nearly any possible THING around or of the body to channel the body out and/or in toward spirit with deliberate and sustained concentration.

The writing of (Soma)tics is an engagement with the thing of things and the spirit of things. My first investigation into (Soma)tic poetry is a series I called *(Soma)tic Midge* This is a 7-poem cycle where I fully immerse myself in a single color for a day. The order of the 7-poem cycle being the natural order of color, starting with RED, then ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN, BLUE, PURPLE, then ending with WHITE. PURPLE being the transformative, natural pivotal color which is born ONLY WHEN the starting color RED (which is the first element of the Zodiac, Aries, or ORIGINAL FIRE) and the last color BLUE (which is the last element of the Zodiac, Pisces, or ADVANCED WATER) bleed together. When I say fully immerse myself in the colors I mean ONLY eating foods of the color of the day, as well as wearing something or keeping something of that color on or around me at all times.

THE FILTERS:

In (Soma)tic PoetryTHEFILTERS are words which function as focal points for the information and notes gathered fromtheexercises. With THE FILTERS you take all of your notes and begin to write poetry aboutorthrough these words, shaping and editing as you go. But it's important to note that THE FILTERSareonly guides, and to help you shape the poem. Also it's good to use at least 2 FILTER wordstoprevent the conversation from becoming entirely internal or confessional, meaning that withtheextension of extra filters the worldview will broaden as the poem takes shape.

http://somaticpoetryexercises.blogspot.com

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

1.) Wash a penny, rinse it, slipit under your tongue and walk out the door. Copper is the metal of Aphrodite, never ever forget this, never, don't forget it, ever. Drink a little orange juice outside and let some of the juice rest in your mouth with the penny. Oranges are the fruit of Aphrodite, and she is the goddess of Love, but not fidelity. Go somewhere outside, go, get going with your penny and juice. Where do you want to sit? Find it, and sit there. What is the best Love you've ever had in this world? Be quiet while thinking about that Love. If someone comes along and starts talking, quietly shoo them away, you're busy, you're a poet with a penny in your mouth, idle chit chat is not your friend. Be quiet so quiet, let the very sounds of that Love be heard in your bones. After a little while take the penny out of your mouth and place it on the top of your head. Balance it there and sit still a little while, for you are now moving your own forces quietly about in your stillness. Now get your pen and paper and write about POVERTY, write line after line about starvation and deprivation from the voice of one who has been Loved in this world.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

2.) In your home alone. Take a bucket or basin of room-temperature water to your front door and strip naked. Put a piece of paper or thin notepad under the bucket and lay a pen nearby. Stand in the water. Get used to being naked while standing in water at the front door. Look through the peep hole. Look for a long time at the world out there. Then look above you, and at the door, the walls, and make note of something you hadn't seen before -- maybe a cobweb or crack in the paint. Every once in a while stretch your arms over your head stretch as high as you can stretch stretch stretch then relax in your bucket. If someone knocks or rings the bell it's your good fortune! Look at them through the peep hole while saying nothing. Maybe have a friend come over at a certain time to knock and say, "Are you naked in your bucket of water?" Don't answer, you're a poet, this isn't time for idle chit chat, besides that you can warn them ahead of time that you won't be answering them. Stretch, and be quiet. Step out of the bucket and sit your poet ass on the floor, get the paper from under the bucket and whistle short, loud bursts of whistle four times. Then write. When you feel the need for more whistles, pause, whistle, then write some more.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

3.) Eat a little dark chocolate before getting on the subway. Sit in the middle of the car, and don't get on a car where there are no seats for you. Sitting is best for this. Eat a little more dark chocolate. For the next few stops examine the interior of the car with care. Then close your eyes, and as the car rolls on its tracks make a low hum from deep inside you. Don't worry, no one can hear you, trust me, I've tested this with a friend. As soon as the car stops write nine words as fast as you can before the train moves again. These are not words you were thinking about, just write, don't question what you write, just write. Repeat this humming and writing for nine stops. Get off the train. Find a bench or patch of grass. Now look at that first set of nine words carefully, then write something about the words. What do they mean to you? Then move onto the next set of nine words and repeat. After this is finished poke around all this writing and see what kind of poem is hiding inside it. It's there, trust me it's there. You've just emerged from the underground, rumbling and grumbling and there is something waiting for you to discover it. (Please Note:) Try to not engage with anyone while in the car, or while leaving the subway. Don't break your concentration. Maybe have a little note prepared to hand a friend you might run into which explains why you can't talk to them. Don't wait for their response, just hand them the note and get about your business, you're busy. And they will understand, don't worry, just get going for your poem.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

4.) Take a red magic marker and draw a 9 on your naked chest.Draw the 9 from the bottom up. Startthe tip of its tail at your naval and sweep UP to have the round circle of its head in the middle of your breasts. Put on a shirt that conceals the 9 from other eyes. Go out to the corner and quickly choose a direction. At the next corner choose another direction. Don't think about where you are going, instead spend the time between corners looking carefully at the world. Finally come to a complete stop at the 9th corner. Look across the street and focus on four different objects. Draw a line to connect them, looking carefully at what's inside this square you've just made. What's outside it? What's half-in? Imagine you string lights to make the square. Imagine its contents at night, dimly lit. Imagine this square a year from now. Ten years from now. Now go somewhere quickly and write, run, run to a place where you can write. Suddenly the city, your city, is a place where places to write come to mind, you must always know those places at all times.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

5.)Go to abookstore. Go to the History Section. Close your eyesand randomly choose a book. Turnto page 108.Read that page and pull one word youlike fromit. Go to the Romance Section, repeat process.Then go to these other 7 sections and repeat process: Gardening,Religion, Biography, Children's, Cookbooks, Law, Horror. After you've collected these 9 words sit in the store, even if you must sit on the floor, then write a poem which includes these 9 words. This poem must be immediate, and it must be written in the store where the 9 words were found on page 108 of 9 different books. I hope you show me your poem one day. Thank you ahead of time.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

6.)If you can be naked for this exercise it is best. Plan to be outside for 9 different sunsets. Get yourself comfortable and seated an hour before the sunset. For 50 minutes focus on your feet. Look at them. Where have they walked in this world? Are they tired? How do they smell? Can you suck your toes? Give them a good taste. But mostly give them some serious concentration, they're your feet, no one else's. This is a meditation for your feet. Imagine they had their own thoughts and told you some things about themselves you did not know. Think of nothing but your feet. Think about one, or both of them gone. Or damaged. Think of them in every way you can imagine thinking about them. Then for the remaining 10 minutes before sunset, just before twilight, write at a fever's pitch about some of those thoughts you have had about your feet. For the other 8 sunsets focus on each of these 8 different body sections, one per sunset: Legs, Genitals, Naval, Breasts, Arms, Hands, Neck, Head (exterior), Head (interior). If when you meditate on your genitals you feel the urge to masturbate that is fine, but try to not orgasm because we want to keep the energy challenged and in flux, not depleted. Of course if you do orgasm don't worry, no big deal. But try to keep yourself from doing so. And if you do masturbate try to not do it for the full 50 minutes, there are many things your genitals would like to tell you if you would only imagine that they could. After the 9 sunsets are completed, take your 9 feverish streams of writings and on a fresh piece of paper put the first word from the first sunset meditation, then the second word on the fresh piece of paper is the first word from the second meditation, and so on, keep going until all the words from all the writings are now fully mixed and on one document. From here you must become the natural editor you are, looking closely, moving words, removing words, working it into the poem that's waiting to be found. Take your time with this, it's nobody's business how long you take.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

7)Okay, so you find out you're going to die, or be killed later today. What meal would you like? What meal is your favorite? Makethat meal for yourself. Sit and write a few lines from the smell and sight of it. Put your ear to theplate and move it around with your fingers or fork, or chopsticks. Listen, smell, look, and eat it, slowly, very, very, slow, ly, eat, it. It's your favorite meal, it's your last meal, enjoy every single flavor. Promise me you're slowly eating? Good. As soon as the last bite is gone move quickly into the bathroom. Blast the cold shower while you strip naked. As soon as your clothes are off then shut the water off. Light a candle, shut off all lights, then sit on the floor of the cold, wet shower with your candle and write your poem, addressing some of what you wrote earlier about your final meal. If someone should catch you and call you a weirdo yell back, "YES I AM NOW LEAVE ME ALONE I'M BUSY!" You are busy, and you are a weirdo, and it's a marvelous thing, now go back to your writing. Forget about them, it's not your fault you're more interesting than they are.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

11)Use blue or purple ink for this please, if you have it. (Purple is best!) Youalso need a sheet of white, unlined paper. Place the pen (purple ink the best!) and paper on the floor in front of a rocking chair. Sit in the chair very still for a few minutes with eyes closed, keeping track of your breath. Then breathe deeply three times, and begin rocking wildly, saying out loud as you rock, "OO-WAH" over and over, nine times. On the ninth count of rocking with "OO-WAH" throw yourself onto the floor and QUICKLY and without thinking draw an X then a line from the X, and where that line ends draw another X. Now repeat this procedure of rocking and "OO-WAH" but when you fling yourself at the pen and paper this time start from the X where the first line had stopped, then quickly draw another line, then put an X where that line stops. Continue repeating until you have nine lines on the page. Now you have a map. Follow your map in whatever location you want, it's your map after all. You can follow it outside by streets and blocks, or in an empty parking lot, or field, or in your bedroom or kitchen. Or have your finger follow the map on the naked body of your lover (this one is my favorite!). But when you come to an X on your map, stop, pause to reflect on this spot where you find yourself. Jot down a few notes. When you have finished your map-following and note- taking you can then squeeze the poem out of the experience. It's there, it's in there.

CAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

15) If you are Right Handedwrite two words on your right arm that you will say to someone today (if you are Left Handed writeon your left arm). Write these words where no one can see them. Your energy leaves your body through this arm, you point with it, you throw with it, this is the arm you use when the world receives from you. Keep these two words in mind all day, touch the words on your arm from time to time when no one is looking. Ask people questions using the two words. Don't ask them about the words, but use the words in your question. Remember what they answer and write it down later. Alone at night place the sheet of paper with answers from people where you can clearly read it. If you are Right Handed your left hand is where energy enters. (Or right if you are Left Handed). Hold your left hand overhead while you write on another sheet of paper. Rotate the hand overhead, and flex its muscles, open and close it, move it, constantly move it, and with the other hand *WRITE! WRITE! WRITE!* Pause from writing (but keep the other hand flexing and moving overhead) to read the answers from people again, then write, let whatever needs to come *COME!* This is going to be beautiful. Relax with it, see what you've made. See what poem or poems wait inside the writing. PLUCK THEM OUT!

ÇAConrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

16)

YOUR BANANA WORD MACHINE: (This is primarily for poets living outside tropical regions) LOCK THE DOOR AND UNPLUG THE PHONE, KILL all outside interference, you must NOT be interrupted because YOU are about to build and ignite your BANANA WORD MACHINE, and once it gets started it doesn't like to stop, for anyone, for any reason! You need: a banana, and pictures of: parrots, boa constrictors, leopards, jaguars, banana trees, men and women carrying bananas to trucks for export, OR anything else which has to do with banana production, or wildlife or anything else native to where bananas grow. No music. No noise. If there is noise use ear plugs. Strip down naked and sit on the floor with your pictures, your banana, pen and paper. Smell the unpeeled banana while looking at each of the pictures you have chosen to build your BANANA WORD MACHINE. When you settle on your favorite picture slowly open the banana, staring at the picture. Imagine this picture ALIVE at the moment it was taken and BE THERE, slowly opening the banana skin, smelling, taking small tastes. When you have absorbed the picture thoroughly, and feel sufficiently transported mentally, get comfortable on your back, then slowly rub banana into your skin wherever you most want to, but make certain to coat your solar plexus, throat, and THOROUGHLY coat your forehead. Feet, genitals, ass, and wherever else you most want to of course since this is YOUR OWN PERSONAL BANANA WORD MACHINE! Slowly chew a little of the banana, and put the skin on your chest as you stretch out on your back with your eyes closed and FILL YOUR BODY with the LOWEST possible HUM you can muster! SUSTAIN THAT HUM! Then relax in your quiet, hum again, keeping eyes closed. Slowly chew a little more, smell, then just relax in your BRAND NEW BANANA WORD MACHINE! When you feel quiet, and your muscles quite limber, slowly massage the banana into your forehead, slowly, softly at first, then deeper and FASTER in a circular, clock-wise motion. THEN SUDDENLY SIT UP inside your BANANA WORD MACHINE and write write write write write WRITE! HUM and massage your forehead again to keep your BANANA WORD MACHINE fully in gear and energized! Write, hum, massage, relax, repeat, repeat, keep going, keep going, you, are, writing, in, your BANANA WORD MACHINE! You will write some of the BEST poems of your life TODAY! *YOUR BANANA WORD MACHINE! LOVE YOUR BANANA WORD MACHINE!* Yellow splendor!

YOUR GARBAGE SPEAKS: SAVE YOUR garbage for a week, every wrapper, every box, carton, save it all. Rinse it out if you must, but it's better if you don't, better to SMELL it. At the end of the week go through each item, slowly, carefully, do it in a closed room, don't let anyone bother you. Don't answer the door or the phone, IGNORE THEM, you're busy looking at garbage to build a poem! Take some notes, write down interesting facts from labels, or the size of things, how they look, how you remember them before discarding them. Imagine where this packaging came from, factories, and before that fields and trucks and many many hands picking them, grinding them, printing with color and black ink. Take notes when thinking about these things. SMELL them one at a time with eyes closed, eyes opened, eyes closed again SMELLING, deeply SMELLING. Notes, take your notes. NOW GET NAKED AND GET IN THE BATHTUB, and go under water, blow bubbles. Go under again and stay under a little longer. DO THIS several more times then COME UP, dry your hands on the side of the tub and grab your notes, and grab your pen and paper and WRITE about drowning, pull your notes together to write a poem about drowning and you're about to die drowning BUT THIS IS what you want to share at the end. GO BACK UNDER the water again, then COME UP AGAIN and WRITE!

LET YOUR TOES KNOW THE TRUTH: Take account of how many times you're not saying or doing EXACTLY what you want to say or do in a day. How many times do you use a tone in your voice which is not honest? How many times are you polite when you want TO SCREAM? How much compromise does your day comprise? Take CLOSE account of this. DON'T LIE ABOUT IT EITHER! This is for you, no one else will know SO BE TOTALLY HONEST! What is your body like when you're not being who you are? How does it feel? Are your hands doing something in particular each time? Your feet? Your groin, your stomach, how does your body react when you are not REALLY you? At the end of the day take notes about this. These notes will be the formal outline for this exercise. After that, EVERY DAY FOR THE NEXT 7 days you will pay attention to the SIGNS OF DISHONESTY in your voice and your body, and whenever you are not who you REALLY WANT TO BE at any moment in the day. Each time you are being polite to your boss, or the baby-sitter, or don't say FUCK because there's a child in the room, EACH TIME you are not you, CLENCH YOUR TOES! CLENCH THEM! Every time, CLENCH THEM! At the end of the day are your toes tired of this? Are they feeling BETTER maybe? Soak your feet in hot salt water and WRITE WRITE WRITE as quickly as you can, EACH NIGHT for 7 nights after a day of TOE CLENCHING DISHONESTY soak them in hot salt water and WRITE with the pace only a FURIOUS YOU would know how to do! OPEN YOUR EYES wider than they're used to being open and WRITE, WRITE WITHOUT BLINKING if you can. WRITE! At the end of 7 days take a long time staring at your feet, your toes, look at them. Stick them in your face if you can, right up to your face and look at them. Take a magnifying glass and look at your feet. For 7 days your toes have been taking the brunt of your dishonest actions. How does that look? Take notes. How does that feel? Take many notes. STICK YOUR TOES IN YOUR MOUTH if you can. How does that taste? Now, take ALL YOUR NOTES, and using THE FILTERS "ARREST" and "BASE" shape your poem 21)

THROUGH THE REMAINS (Dedicated to Dodie Bellamy for her essay, "Digging Through KathyAcker's Stuff"). Read this interview with Dodie Bellamy for an introduction to the exercise. Choose an article of clothing that holds special meaning to you, especially if it's something someone you love gave to you. Wear it all day the day before the exercise, infusing the article of clothing with your body by living your day EXACTLY how you want to live. Give the clothes a full day of LIVING with your body, eating, drinking, loving how you want to. The next day take the clothes out into the world with you wherever you go with your notebook. Drape them on a tree, or bench, keep them near you like a doppelganger, like an old friend, like someone you need to know better. Take notes about how you're feeling about the clothes being in your life. What are all of these feelings? Was it given to you by someone you love? If so, when did you last see them? What were you talking about? Take notes, lots of notes. Place the clothes in a bag, keep the bag near you. Meditate on the bag. Then have just a portion of the clothes poke out of the bag. What can you see about them like this that you hadn't noticed before? Study the textures, and, what is it made from? Leather, wool, silk, what is it? Imagine the animals or plants it was made from. Can you see these animals and plants in the world before they were your clothes? Trains, boats, trucks, imagine these forms of transportation bringing the raw materials into the hands or machines that made these clothes you love. Take note, lots of notes. Wrap the clothes on you in a way you don't usually wear them. Take notes while they are on you. Wrap them around your head, and take many more notes. Hold them in your hands, close your eyes, imagine where they will go when you die. Imagine them in the world without you. Take notes, and if anyone interrupts you SHOO THEM AWAY, politely if you want, but get rid of them, YOU'RE BUSY! Now take all of your notes, and using **THE FILTERS** "FRICTION" and "HALLUCINATION" get to work shaping your poem.

DEATH AS DIRT AS POETRY IS:

23) as portosi. Find a spot where no one will pester you, a graveyard, you're home to write poetry *not to be pestered with small talk!* When you have found your spot sit down on the ground. Take time tolookclosely at ALL OBJECTS at your feet, in the trees, etc. Find three objects, one of them on theground, or at least touching the ground: your feet, a grave marker, tree trunk or roots, etc. The othertwooff the ground in a tree, a building, but make them things which are stationary so you can stayfocused on them. Draw a triangle between these three objects. Focus hard on the contents of yourtriangle, keeping in mind that the ground object you have chosen connects to the dead. Imagineyour triangle in different forms of light, darkness, weather, and seasons. Imagine someone youloveinside the triangle dying. Imagine yourself inside it dying. Gather notes in this process, takenotes, as many notes as you can about how you feel and what you feel. Then PAUSE from thesenotes to focus again on your triangle, THEN write QUICKLY AND WITHOUT THINKING for asmuchtime as you can manage. Often it's these spontaneous notes which dislodge important information for us. DO NOT HESITATE to write the most brutal things that come to mind, HESITATE at nothing for that matter. Take some deep breaths and think about death by murder, war, cancer, suicide, accidents, knives, fire, drowning, crushing, decapitation, torture, plagues, animal attacks, dehydration, guns, stones, tanks, bombs, genocide, strokes, explosions, electrocutions, guillotine, firing squads, parasites, suffocation, flash floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, cyanide, poison, capital punishment, falling, stampedes, strangulation, freezing, baseball bats, overdose, plane crashes, fist fights, choking, etc., imagine every possible form of death. Take notes on your feelings for death at this point, DO NOT HESITATE. Now, TAKE ALL YOUR NOTES, and using THE FILTERS "QUICKEN" and "EMBLEM" shape your poem.

28) **AMERICAN poem, AMERICAN poet, *therootstherootstherootstherearearoots:*** Go to a local government building or monument, courthouse, statue or prison, but a government structure, one paid for by all tax payers. This monument or building is something you paid to create, something you pay to upkeep. It stands for the collective stronghold of our nation, as Americans, as America moves and removes our collective fingerprints around the world as a military, as a business, as a structure of faces supplanting trust and empathy with a guise of trust and empathy under the guise of one flag. This is not to say an angry poem must ensue. This is just saying LET'S GET CLEAR. This is not to suggest you read up on American assassinations of leftist governments in South America, this is just saying KNOW what you already know to be true when coming to this poem. We're here as Americans. It's an American poem in a way that has roots, literally roots. Study the plants if there are plants. Study the grass around this government building or monument. Smell samples of the soil. What's around? See everything as best as you can, sit very still and look closely at the world as it always is around this structure you have come to today. DO NOT ENGAGE IN COVERSATION WITH OTHERS. You're here for how you see it, how you see this structure, how you see our country. This is personal. The date presently is April, 2009. We are at war on more than one front, millions of lives have been lost, and who knows how many more are at stake as our tax dollars purchase bullets and bombs, prisons and worse. Look at this structure you have come to, and know you are paying for its upkeep. You have a claim to it today. Take a list of notes about the structure, but these will be the notes you glean from later, as these are not the real notes for the poem. Take another list of notes while investigating the plant life, the soil, the natural surroundings. Take yet another list of notes about the government structure, only this time take notes about WHAT it is made from. Is there wood? Is there metal? Write in your notes about trees and rocks, iron and oil. Write about the elements all these parts of the structure originated from, and how they arrived here by boat and truck. Take the notes of the government structure broken down into the finer notes of the natural elements the structure originated from, and combine those notes with the notes of the natural world surrounding the structure today. Weave these notes, as this is an exercise in weaving notes. Now with the FEELINGS you have of being an American TODAY, whose tax dollars continue to pay for the cost TRUE HUMAN COST of two wars, form these final notes into a poem BUT WITHOUT EVER mentioning the government structure. And without directly involving America by name. Write a poem as a poet of the world with feelings for our collective human costs of war. Write this poem through THE GRASS AND TREES you see around you. Now take all your notes, and using THE FILTERS "ALERT" and "EXILE" shape your poem.

29) Go to a shopping mall parking lot with trees and other landscaping growing between the cars to create this poem. Find a tree you connect with, feel it out, bark, branches, leaves. Sit on it's roots to see if it wants you OFF! These trees are SICK WITH converting car exhaust and shopper exhale all fucking day! Sit with your tree friend. Don't pay attention to the cars coming in and out of the parking lot, you're here to write poetry, not to worry about what a lunatic you appear to be. Remember what our QUEEN poet of merging celestial bodies Mina Loy said, "If you are very frank with yourself and don't mind how ridiculous anything that comes to you may seem, you will have a chance of capturing the symbol of your direct reaction." Public Space is not easy in shopping mall parking lots, but calmly explain yourself to the security guard like I did when creating this exercise. They will train a camera on you, but the sooner you get rid of them the sooner you can train the camera of your brain. Take notes, feverishly at first. Use a magnifying glass to study the dirt, trunk, to look carefully at leaf veins and bark structure. Notes, take notes, writing quickly, as if you've just discovered a sleeping creature that may wake at any moment and ATTACK YOU! Smell your hand, smell a branch. Study then the sky and buildings and people and everything, every detail. Face one direction and stare for a few seconds. Close your eyes and while they're closed imagine what you saw. Open your eyes and notice what you missed when imagining what you saw. Study what was missed and where and how it exists in relation to your tree friend. Take notes. If you are right-handed then touch the tree with your left hand, for your left hand is the hand which absorbs the world. Then walk to other trees in the parking lot and touch them with your right hand, for your right hand is the hand which sends your messages OUT of you. Touching your right hand to the other trees sends OUT of you the message your tree friend put into you through your left hand. Take notes on what was said from tree to tree. What message were you carrying? Take notes while leaving. Later, at home, close your eyes and remember your tree friend, take more notes from this visit with your memory. Now take all your notes, and using THE FILTERS "TRACT" and "INITIATE," shape your poem.

ANNOINT YOURSELF:

Visit the home of a deceased poet you admire and bring some natural thing back with you. I went to Emily Dickinson's house the day after a reading event with my friend Susie Timmons. I scraped dirt from the foot of huge trees in the backyard into a little pot. We then drove into the woods where we found miniature pears, apples and cherries to eat. I meditated in the arms of an oak tree with the pot of Emily's dirt, waking to the flutter of a red cardinal on a branch a foot or so from my face, staring, showing me his little tongue. When I returned to Philadelphia I didn't shower for three days, then rubbed Emily's dirt all over my body, kneaded her rich Massachusetts soil deeply into my flesh, then put on my clothes and went out into the world. Every once in awhile I stuck my nose inside the neck of my shirt to inhale her delicious, sweet earth covering me. I felt revirginized through the ceremony of my senses, I could feel her power tell me these are the ways to walk and speak and shift each glance into total concentration for maximum usage of our little allotment of time on a planet. LOSE AND WASTE NO MORE TIME POET! Lose and waste no more time she said to me as I took note after note on the world around me for the poem.

TOUCH YOURSELF FOR ART: There must be a piece of art near where you live that you enjoy, even LOVE! A piece of art that IF THERE WAS WAR you would steal it and hide it in your littleapartment. I'm going to PACK my apartment TO THE ROOF when war comes! This exercise needs 7 days, but not 7 consecutive days as most museums and galleries are not open 7 days a week. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art hangs the Mark Rothko "Orange, Red and Yellow, 1961," a painting I would marry and cherish in sickness and in health, have its little Rothko babies, hang them on the wall with their father, and a portrait of my breasts to feed them at any hour. For 7 days I sat with my dearest Rothko. The security guards will think you're odd when you come for 7 days to sit and meditate. Never mind that, bribe them with candy, cigarettes or soda, whatever it takes to be left in peace. Bring binoculars because you will get closer to the painting than anyone else in the room! Feel free to fall in love with what you see, you're a poet, you're writing a poem, go ahead and fall in love! Feel free to go to the museum restroom and touch yourself in the stall, you may not be allowed to touch the paintings but they can't stop you from touching yourself, fantasizing touching and being touched by them. And be sure to write on the restroom wall that you were there and what you were doing as everyone enjoys a dedication to the details in museums. And be certain to leave your number, you never know what other art lover will be reading. When you return REMEMBER THAT there is no museum in the world with rules against the use of binoculars, information you may need for the guards if you run out of cigarettes and candy. Map your 7 days with extravagant enhancements: mint leaves to suck, chocolate liqueurs, cotton balls between your toes, firm-fitting satin underwear, things you can rock-out with (in secret) for the art you love. Take notes, there must be a concentration in note-taking in your pleasure-making. Never mind how horrifying your notes may become, horror and pleasure have an illogical mix when you touch yourself for art. Once you gather your 7 days of notes together you will see the poem waiting to be pulled out of a long and energizing dream.

SOMA)NIMAL COMMUNIQUE: *DAY ONE:* On 8 small pieces of paper draw 8 different animals with crayons, magic markers, pens, paint, or whatever. Elephants, bats, tigers, wolves, and even supernatural animals like angels, dragons, leprechauns, horse ghosts. Make one of these your spirit totem, or at least an animal you feel an affinity for. On the back of the drawing write something like, “HELLO, my name is Craig, and I am a dragon from rural Pennsylvania. You might have some questions for me, and I might have some questions for you.” Create an e-mail address to include with your message. Go out into public and leave each animal for strangers to find on subways, in libraries, at hair salons, or taped to a restroom stall. SAVE your totem animal for last. Research the spiritual and mystical legends associated with your animal. For instance one of my totems is the crow which is said to know both Divine Law and Human Law, but always weighs situations by Divine Law. While walking through Philadelphia with my crow drawing I looked for such signs. For instance it is perfectly legal by Human Law for rich people to purchase diamonds many suffered to mine, and then to walk past homeless people begging for spare change for supper. Clearly the Science of Love has no legitimate testimony for Human Law. Take notes throughout the entire process of the animal card creations and public deposits. And involve any correspondence with strangers in your poem. *DAY TWO:* Begin your day with a walk around your neighborhood. Notice the animals that surround us. Try to keep a list of them and what they say to you as they cross your path. This can include squirrels, dogs, cats, rats, mice, etc…bugs are animals too, in my opinion. Look for them. Listen to them. Talk to them. Take notes. Use at least 1/3 of these "conversations" in the poem.

49) **TAKE A (SOMA)TIC BUS RIDE:** *PART ONE*: Take a bus to a city where you have never lived. lurching stopping. This is excellent for poetry, these bad bus drivers. Have one foot on the floor, the other hovering an inch above the floor. FEEL the staggering, growling engine through the floor. Look outside. What engines move the world out there? Trees, what does the engine of a tree sound like? Touch the seat in front of you in two-second intervals. Lift your hand to the air in front of you. It is FREE from the vibrations of the bus. HOW is this your life? What does it even mean to ask "HOW is this your life?" How are you FREE and not free? Look around you at the strangers on the bus. You are near people who share planet Earth with you. LOOK AT THEM. What do you have in common with each other? Take notes, take notes, notes notes notes. *PART TWO:* When you get off the bus, you should be hungry. Go get something to eat at a kind of restaurant you've never eaten at before, and order something you've never tasted before. As you eat, say the name once in a while of the dish you've ordered, and think about the sounds of the words along with the taste of the food -- does it match? Are there discrepancies? Take notes on your napkin. Ask the server what they think about the dish -- do they like it, why, why not? Take as many napkins with you as you can so you can write on them throughout the day. Exit the place and ask the first person you see (or who'll answer you) in which direction they think you should walk. You're not worried about going any direction in particular. If they ask what type of destination you want, say "Look, I need some guidance, okay?" Walk a couple of blocks and then ask another person "Left or right or straight ahead?" Do this 7 times. Walk two blocks after the 7th direction -- this is your destination. Take out your napkins and write about what you saw on the way, see now, and how the food feels in your belly. Do this sitting on the ground. Shape all your notes into a poem.

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Stolen From Our Bodies

FirstNationsTwo-Spirits/QueersandtheJourney to a Sovereign Erotic

qwo-li driskill

This is a Warrior Song
From one poor Skin to another
And I don't know what I'm lookin' for
But I know I've found you

These words will shuffle across concrete
Will float across the Rockies
To the Smokey Mountains
We were stolen from
We were stolen from

We were stolen from our bodies
We were stolen from our homes
And we are fighters in this long war
To bring us all back home

And this is a Warrior Song
From one poor Skin to another
And I don't know what I'm lookin' for
But I know I've found you

U-ne-la-nv-hi U-we-tsi
I-ga-gu-yv-he-yi
Hna-quo-tso-sv Wi-yu-lo-se
But I know I've found you

And this is a Warrior Song
From one poor Skin to another
And I don't know what I'm lookin' for
But I know I've found you1

This song came to me one night a few years ago as I began to understand that healing our sexualities as First Nations people is braided with the legacy of historical trauma and the ongoing process of decolonization. Two-Spirits are integral to this struggle: my own resistance to colonization as a Cherokee Two-Spirit is intimately connected to my continuing efforts to heal from sexual assault and the manifestations of an oppressive overculture on my erotic life. Like other Two-Spirit people, I am making a journey to a Sovereign Erotic that mends our lives and communities.2

I mention my experiences with trauma in this essay because sexual assault, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are entangled with the history of colonization. Sexual assault is an explicit act of colonization that has enormous impacts on both personal and national identities and because of its connections to a settler mentality, can be understood as a colonial form of violence and oppression. My own journey back to my body, and the journeys of other First Nations people back to their bodies, necessarily engage historical trauma. In her book *Shaking the Rattle: Healing the Trauma of Colonization* Barbara-Helen Hill (Six Nations, Grand River Territory) writes:

All of the abuse and addiction that we are seeing in communities are symptoms of the underlying cause, the oppression and the stress of living in isolation on reservations or in Native communities within the larger non-Native communities. . . . Healing the spirit of the individual will eventually spread to healing the spirit of family and this in turn will spread out into the communities. . . . (36)

When I speak of a Sovereign Erotic, I'm speaking of an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations. I am in agreement with Audre

Lorde when she writes, “Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning in our lives” (57). I do not see the erotic as a realm of personal conse- quence only. Our relationships with the erotic impact our larger com- munities, just as our communities impact our senses of the erotic. A Sovereign Erotic relates our bodies to our nations, traditions, and his- tories.

The term “Two-Spirit” is a word that resists colonial definitions of who we are. It is an expression of our sexual and gender identities as sovereign from those of white GLBT movements. The coinage of the word was never meant to create a monolithic understanding of the array of Native traditions regarding what dominant European and Euroamerican traditions call “alternative” genders and sexualities. The term came into use in 1990 at a gathering of Native Queer/Two-Spirit people in Winnipeg as a means to resist the use of the word “berdache,” and also as a way to talk about our sexualities and genders from within tribal contexts in English (Jacobs et al. 2). I find myself using both the words “Queer” and “Trans” to try to translate my gendered and sexual realities for those not familiar with Native traditions, but at heart, if there is a term that could possibly describe me in English, I simply consider myself a Two-Spirit person. The process of translating Two-Spiritness with terms in white communities becomes very complex. I’m not necessarily “Queer” in Cherokee contexts, because differences are not seen in the same light as they are in Euroamerican contexts. I’m not necessarily “Transgender” in Cherokee contexts, because I’m simply the gender I am. I’m not necessarily “Gay,” because that word rests on the concept of men-loving-men, and ignores the complexity of my gender identity. It is only within the rigid gender regimes of white America that I become Trans or Queer. While homophobia, transphobia, and sexism are problems in Native communities, in many of our tribal realities these forms of oppression are the result of colonization and genocide that cannot accept women as leaders, or people with extra-ordinary genders and sexualities. As Native people, our erotic lives and identities have been colonized along with our homelands.

many kinds it becomes difficult to count them all. Survivors of so many genocides that one simply bleeds into the next. As a Red-Black person, the Trail of Tears and other forced relocations are not the first removals of my peoples.4 I find myself obsessed with the notion of "home" on many levels. I have not only been removed from my homelands, I have also been removed from my erotic self and continue a journey back to my first homeland: the body. "We were stolen from our bodies / We were stolen from our homes."

Sexual assault was not something that was tolerated in most of our cultures before invasion. In Lakota custom, for example, the "Rare Knife" was given to Lakota women to use only to cut off the heads of men who abused her or her children.5 Consequently, abuse was rare in Lakota lifeways before white supremacist patriarchy enforced violence against women and children. Wilma Mankiller reminds us,

Europeans brought with them the view that men were the absolute head of households, and women were to be submissive to them. It was then that the role of women in Cherokee society began to decline. One of the new values Europeans brought to the Cherokees was a lack of balance and harmony between men and women. It was what we today call sexism. This was not a Cherokee concept. Sexism was borrowed from Europeans. (20)

Sexual violence is rampant in all communities in the United States. Recent events within the Catholic Church show how often sexual abuse of children is silently condoned. Sexual abuse must be seen with an understanding of the history of colonization, which uses sexuality as a tool to gain power over others and to control women's bodies. In this country the *white wing* attempts to make abortion illegal at the same time women of color and poor women continue to survive forced sterilization. It is no accident that white masculinity is constructed the way it is in the United States, as European invasion of the Americas required a masculinity that murders, rapes, and enslaves Native and African peoples. It is a masculinity that requires men to be soldiers and conquerors in every aspect of their lives. A masculinity rooted in genocide breeds a culture of sexual abuse. It is vital to remember that most of our traditions did not allow such behavior. Healing from assault is

intimately joined with decolonization and the reclamation of indigenous understandings of the world.

We were stolen from our bodies
We were stolen from our homes
And we are fighters in this long war
To bring us all back home

A colonized sexuality is one in which we have internalized the sexual values of dominant culture. The invaders continue to enforce the idea that sexuality and non-dichotomous genders are a sin, recreating sexuality as illicit, shocking, shameful, and removed from any positive spiritual context. Queer sexualities and genders are degraded, ignored, condemned, and destroyed. As people often raised under dominant culture's values through our homes, televisions, or teachers, Two-Spirit erotic lives continue to be colonized. Native people survive a legacy of spiritual and sexual abuse at the hands of soldiers, missionaries, clergy, and teachers who have damaged our senses of Self and wounded our sacred connection to our bodies. The boarding school systems in the United States and Canada are one example of the ways our sexualities, genders, and spirits have been colonized by the invaders. Boarding schools continue to have severe repercussions on our communities, including colonized concepts of gender and sexuality. To decolonize our sexualities and move towards a Sovereign Erotic, we must unmask the specters of conquistadors, priests, and politicians that have invaded our spirits and psyches, insist they vacate, and begin tending the open wounds colonization leaves in our flesh.

I have seen no study that tells how many Two-Spirit people commit suicide or turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with the shame colonization brings to our sexualities and genders.6 How many Two-Spirit people are forced to leave their families and thus their primary connection to their traditions because of homophobia and transphobia? How many of us grapple with deep shame because of our sexualities and/or genders? Our sexualities harbor bruises left by a white supremacist culture. We find ourselves despising our bodies and sexualities, unable to speak of our own erotic lives and desires even with our lovers. We see dominant culture's concepts of the erotic and know they have nothing

to do with our Two-Spirit bodies, often causing us to dissociate from our erotic selves or assimilate dominant culture's concepts into our lives. Marilou Awiakta (Cherokee/Appalachian) writes, "Thinking of sex as an it and women as sex objects is one of the grooves most deeply carved into the Western mind. This groove in the national mind of America will not accept the concept of sex as part of the sacred and generative power of the universe—and of woman as a bearer of the life force" (252). It is not only First Nations people who have internalized dominant culture's concepts of sexuality and gender. The legacy of colonization seeps into every aspect of life in this country, even if only Native folks and other people of color recognize it.

Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk) writes about the importance of Two-Spirit engagement in a process of healing from historical trauma:

> Much of the self-hatred we carry around inside us is centuries old. This self-hatred is so coiled within itself, we often cannot distinguish the racism from the homophobia from the sexism. We carry the stories of our grandmothers, our ancestors. And some of these stories are ugly and terrorizing. And some are beautiful testaments to endurance and dignity. We must learn to emulate this kind of testimony. Speaking ourselves out loud—for our people, for ourselves. To deny our sexuality is to deny our part in creation. (63)

To understand our place in creation, I look at the stories within my tradition that celebrate difference. To my knowledge as a non-fluent Cherokee speaker, there is currently no term in Cherokee to describe Two-Spirit people. We simply *are*. However, within our stories are roadmaps for contemporary Cherokee Two-Spirits. Many of our stories address difference, the embodiment of dichotomies, and journeys between worlds. Craig Womack (Oklahoma Creek-Cherokee) reminds us, "Rather than disrupting society, anomalies actually reify the existing social order. . . . That which is anomalous is also an important source of power. The Southeastern belief system is not an oppositional world of good and evil" (*Red on Red*244). Our stories as First Nations people keep us alive in a world that routinely destroys and discards us. Though our stories were present as survival cartographies before the invasion

of Turtle Island by Columbus and the crowned power of Spain, our stories are perhaps even more vital to our survival now, during the European occupation of our homelands.7

It is in our stories, including our written literatures, that I search for meaning and reflection of my Two-Spirit body in order to survive a world in which people like me are routinely killed. How do I make sense of the murder of F. C. Martinez Jr., a Diné/Cheyenne Nádleeh youth killed in June 2001 in Cortez, Colorado? How do I make sense of the February 2002 murder of Amy/Raymond Soos, a Two-Spirit of the Pima Nation whose naked body was found in Phoenix, Arizona? How do I make sense of the strangled and beaten body of Alejandro Lucero, Hopi Nation, whose body was found on March 4,2002, also in Phoe- nix? How do I make sense of the slaughter of "Brandon Teena," always spoken of as white, who was actually of mixed "Sioux" and white ances- try, his life erased by transphobic murderers and his Nativeness erased by white Queer and Trans folks?8 How do we as Two-Spirits remain whole and confident in our bodies and in our traditions when loss attempts to smother us? I return to our stories.

Many Cherokee stories deal with characters considered outsiders, who live in liminal spaces, help bring about necessary change, and aid in the process of creation. In one story, a water spider brings fire to the other animals after many larger and stronger animals attempt to re- trieve it and fail. She creates a bowl and straps it to her back with spider silk in order to carry fire across the water. In another version of the story, a dragonfly assists her by pushing the bowl from behind (Mooney 431). This story is significant to Cherokee Two-Spirits because so much of it deals with the embodiment of opposites. Spider is specifically a water-spider, and in Mooney's recording of the story, a species of spi- der that is black with red stripes, opposite sacred colors in Cherokee cosmology (Mooney 241). Dragonfly also dwells between worlds of water, air, and earth. In Cherokee cosmology, fire is associated with the female principal and water is associated with the male principal. Drag- onfly and spider become beings that help join these realities.

A Sovereign Erotic is a return to and/or continuance of the complex realities of gender and sexuality that are ever-present in both the hu- man and more-than-human world, but erased and hidden by colonial

cultures. Oppression is used by the "settlers" to "tame" our "wild" and "savage" understandings of our Selves, to injure our traditional under- standings of the world, to pit us against each other along divisions of gender, sexuality, skin tone, geography, "blood-quantum," (dis)ability, and class so that the powers that be have less work to do in maintaining control over our homelands, our bodies, and our spirits.9

In discussing the colonization of Queer African and First Nations bodies and sexualities, elias farajajé-jones writes:

> My . . . African ancestors stood on auctioning blocks in this country where their bodies were offered for sale. They were subjected to the white "gaze" quite literally; their genitalia were touched and inspected in a very public way. The bodies of my First Nations (Tsalagi/Cherokee) ancestors were forcibly removed, infected, massacred, locked up. They were so effectively removed and locked up that they do not even enter into the erotic fictions of the dominating culture. (Kay et al. 328)

Knowing this, Two-Spirit writers, artists, and scholars should turn to and create our own Sovereign Erotic literatures.

In Our Oldest Language

Tsuj'/ Boy, you are ga-lv-lo'/sky
continually above me
I am eloh'/earth your hands reach
inside to aching molten rock
Your fingers gilded wings
that rise and thrust against
dark muscle rhythms
rock me until I am coiled
around you blooming

Your lightning tongue
summons me to skim
the sweltering expanse of your back
tempts me to nv-yo-i/the rocky place
between your thighs where

you are hard as a cedar flute
a-s-da-ya/taut
as a drum

Water swells at your bank
threatens to break loose
But I am slow
so slow
and steady as a panther
Nibble and suck
strawberries
Flick my tongue across their dark tips
u-wa-n-sv ale tsu-wo-du/ripe and beautiful
Lure their flavor to the surface of your skin

My mouth hungry for your pulse
even and soft on my lips
My hands blanketed by your hair
Your chest silvered and wet
against mine

V:v/Yes
Our moans a low fierce rumble
a coming storm10

Two-Spirit people are creating literatures that reflect Sovereign Erotics, and in doing so participate in the process of radical, holistic decolonization. The erotic within First Nations literatures is rarely examined, and Two-Spirit erotics are often ignored. Womack observes, "I would speculate that a queer Indian presence . . . *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner the public will not accept. Deeply embedded in the romanticism about Indians are ideas regarding gender. . . . The queer Indian fits none of these popular imaginings" (*Red on Red*280).

In Her I Am by Chrystos (Menominee) has received praise from other Two-Spirit, Lesbian, and Queer identified women, but has been

largely ignored by critics. Not only is this due to the fact that unapolo- getic Lesbian erotica threatens heteropatriarchal culture, but also be- cause the Sovereign Erotic set forth in her book deals with histories of abuse and colonization that deeply complicate the text. *In Her I Am* demonstrates radical Two-Spirit woman-centered erotics as tools for healing from colonization. The poem "Against" grapples with genocide, abuse, and homophobia and their effects on sexual relationships:

> We're survivors of childhood violence with black eyes
> in common from mothers who hated our difference
> [. . . . . .]
> Your people as well as mine slaughtered in millions
> Queer we're still open season
> My fingermarks on your ass are loving you
> [. . . . . .]
> Desire red & raw as wounds we disguise
> we're open season. (Chrystos 4–25)

It is poems such as this, which examine the complexities of sexuality within an abusive culture, that are needed in order for Two-Spirit people to engage with healing and (re)creating Sovereign Erotic spaces in our lives and work. Chrystos writes,

> Because sex has been split off from us as women in a colonizer culture, we ourselves police our pleasure. . . . We need to engage in a radical discussion & redefinition of our sexuality, a discussion which has been co-opted to issues of biology (abortion & conception), rather than sexual freedom, remembering that freedom needs the bones of responsibility to flourish. (83)

Chrystos undertakes this redefinition through the creation of erotic poems for other Native Two-Spirit women that encompass First Nations traditions and histories. In "Woman" the gathering of wild rice is eroticized:

> will you come with me moving
> through rivers to soft lakebeds
> [. . . . . .]

> Will you go with me
> down the long waters smoothly shaking
> life into our journey. (Chrystos 1–6)

Likewise, "Tenderly Your" situates the erotic within historical memory:

We're in the grass of prairies our grandmothers rode
Sweet smell of distant cookpots edges the blue
Your kisses are a hundred years old & newly born. (Chrystos 3–5)

The poem continues by discussing the erotic as a tool for healing from trauma:

Flaming ride us past our rapes our pain
past years when we stumbled lost
[. . . . . .]
This
is why we were made by creation. (9–14)

Sovereign Erotics are also reflected in Craig Womack's *Drowning in Fire*. Through the narrative of Josh Henneha, lines between historical memory and contemporary lives spiral into one another. The erotic relationship that develops between Josh and Jimmy weaves itself into a history of Creek resistance to allotment and Oklahoma statehood. Snake motifs throughout the text represent both the supernatural tie-snake, an embodiment of opposites, and the Snake faction in Creek resistance history. During a sexual encounter between Josh and Jimmy, snakes appear:

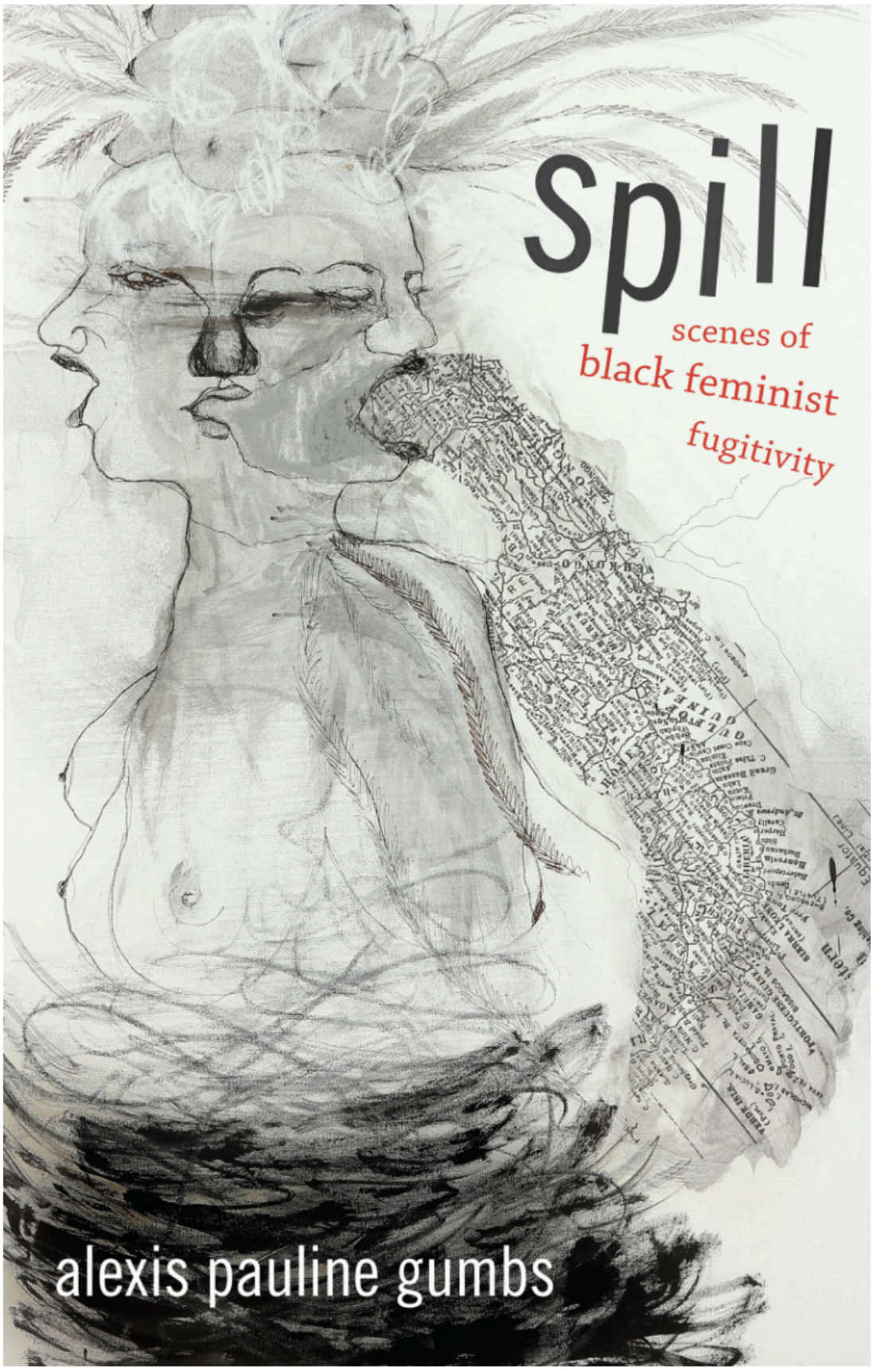
> There were snakes everywhere, shimmering rainbows of color and motion, circles and circles. . . . A copperhead was dancing around one of Jimmy's Air Jordans lying on the floor. A giant rattlesnake sat coiled around the copperhead and the tennis shoes, shaking his tail like an accompaniment to the swaying dance inside the circles they had made, the snakes within snakes. . . . The whip snake came down from the lamp, crawled over our way, placed his head on the edge of the sparse white sheet, and flicked his tongue at us. (Womack, *Drowning in Fire*)

Womack also connects the erotic to the sacred through the relationship between Josh and Jimmy. After the couple makes love in a creek, Josh dreams:

> I dreamed that I came back a year later with him and the pond was no longer there, only a large, shimmering mud flat. . . . In the dried-up creekbed, at the exact spot where Jimmy had come in the creek, had grown a red cedar. My Aunt Lucy stepped out from behind it, and she laughed at the way she'd startled us. "See, boys," she said, nodding at the cedar, "now you know where those trees come from. (*Drowning in Fire*279)

The Sovereign Erotics created by Two-Spirits are part of the healing of the wounded bodies of ourselves, our lands, and our planet. Collections of First Nations erotic writing that include the work of Two-Spirit writers such as *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica* edited by Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishanaabe) and Red Ink Magazine's Love & Erotic Issue (Volume 11:1) are quickly emerging in North America. We were stolen from our bodies, but now we are taking ourselves back. First Nations Two-Spirits are blooming like dandelions in the landscape of a racist, homophobic, and transphobic culture's ordered garden. Through over 500 years of colonization's efforts to kill our startling beauty, our roots have proven too deep and complicated to pull out of the soil of our origin, the soil where we are nurtured by the sacrifices that were made by our ancestors' commitment to love us.

> And we are fighters in this long war
> to bring us all back home


spill
scenes of
black feminist
fugitivity
alexis pauline gumbs

TO BLACK WOMEN
who make and break narrative

/ / /

after and with
Black White and In Color
by Hortense Spillers

spill

spil/

verb

Origin

Old English spillan,
"kill, destroy, waste,
shed (blood)";
of unknown origin.

A NOTE

And so I was trying to ask the question again, ask it anew,
as if it had not been asked before, because the language
of the historian was not telling me what I needed to know.
Which is, what is it like in the interstitial spaces where
you fall between everyone who has a name, a category,
a sponsor, an agenda, spokespersons, people looking out
for them—but you don't have anybody.

—HORTENSE SPILLERS

This writing started to spill out one day when I was listening to Hortense Spillers speak at the Feminist Theory workshop at Duke University. I had been reading and writing about Spillers for years, but something became clear that day about my relationship to her work. What kept me coming back to her essays over and over again was not only what she said (though what she says about race, gender, capitalism, and literature is enough to come back for forever); it was also *how* she said it. Again and again, there were phrases in her work that did far more than make her point. They made worlds. They invited affect. They brought to mind nameless women in unknown places who were laughing and looking sideways at each other and a world that couldn't understand them.

I started this experiment thinking that I could take specific phrases from particular essays in *Black, White, and in Color* out of context, and then I realized that I could never take them out of context. Or that context couldn't take them at all. Which is to say that when I turned these phrases, doors opened and everyone came through. All the black women writers Spillers wrote about and didn't write about. All the characters those black women writers acknowledged and ignored. All the people living novelistic lives without arcs or arks to save them. As usual, the project took over and offered scene after scene out of time and invited voices and settings that I can't claim to have invented. It is either that I was craving these scenes and these voices or they were craving me and we met up at the hot spot called *Black, White, and in Color.*

This space, which is a temporary space, which we must leave, for the sake of future travelers and our own necks, is a sacred dedicated space. Libation for the named and the nameless. This is for black women who made and broke narrative. The quiet, the quarrelling, the queer. This is where. This is what. This is how.

spill (v) 1. cause or allow (liquid) to flow over the edge of its container, especially unintentionally.

"You'll spill that coffee if you're not careful."

SYNONYMS: *knock over, tip over, upset, overturn*

the ground shakes with us
the gathering women
grows rich grows brown grows deep
the gathered hands women
grown brown grown women
the sure determined feet
the ground grows everything we eat
the graceful stomping women heading home
ungrateful women populating poems
the ground has everything it needs
we have never been alone

the sky sings for us
the rainmaking women the rage-taking women
the blood
the sky so open so nose wide open
can't refuse the shape of our lungs
can't bear to remain above
the sky sees the shoulders that shrug off hate
and celebrate and hug
the sky slows the rhythm by falling out
and down and done and drug
the sky begins to know itself
we breathe it in as love

the water waits for us
the wide-eyed women the walking women the worst
the water washes the war wrung women
the wailers the whistle the first

the water waists of the undrowned women
the hope floats women the strong
the water knows us
the whole-note women
the half-step harmony song

the fire frees us
the fast-ass women the fall-in-love women the freaks
the fire is full of the all-out women
the walk-out women the sweet
the fire is finding the love-lost women
the worth-it women the ones
fire is blazing the brash blues women
the black-eyed women
the wiry women with guns
the fire is becoming the sun

our work here is not done

Hemphill, P. (2021). Boundaries can be love. In adrienne maree brown (Ed.), Holding change: The way of emergent strategy facilitation and mediation (pp. 47–49). AK Press.

PRENTIS HEMPHILL (They/Them) is a therapist, somatics teacher and facilitator, political organizer, writer and the founder of The Embodiment Institute. For over 10 years, Prentis has been working with individuals and organizations during their most challenging moments of change; navigating leadership transitions, conflict, and realigning practice with values. All of this Prentis does through an embodied approach, ensuring that our intentions and ideas can be lived out and practiced in our lives and through our bodies. Before founding The Embodiment Institute, Prentis was the Healing Justice Director at Black Lives Matter Global Network and a lead somatics teacher with generative somatics, an organization committed to bringing politicized somatics to movement building, and Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD), a group dedicated to rebuilding Blackmovement infrastructure,for the past seven years. Prentis holds a M.A. in Clinical Psychology and has worked in low cost mental healthclinics offeringtherapeuticservices tomarginalized people.

Website: https://prentishemphill.com/

Boundaries Can Be Love

byPrentisHemphill

I learned first about walls. I was raised by a great storm of a father and a mother who was kind, and sometimes fearful too. Our house could fill with yells and teeth-grinding fear almost as easily as it could fill with belly laughs and dancing. It was unpredictable, and almost worse than the rage was the uncertainty of where the next eruption would come from. So, I built walls as a child. Very literally forts, stiff couch-cushion blockades. My mother would say that I built forts just to sit in there and sweat, but I built them, actually, so I could breathe. I created a predictable space that could hold and protect me.

It wasn't until my twenties that I realized that I had become trapped in those walls. That my body had, along the way, calculated the risk of connection to be too high to engage. And from where I sat, the real me, in the seat of myself, I found it dangerous to reveal. I had forgotten how to get out of myself and really be with others.

Walls can seem a lot like boundaries, they're easy to confuse. But walls more likely become a rule. They erect themselves along a certainty, i.e. intimacy is unsafe or I'm too much to be in relationship with. They reinforce or create a static worldview that is transferable to other conditions, other relationships. They have a way of keeping you captive when they were once designed to keep you safe.

Boundaries, on the other hand, are responsive, movable, and highly dependent on real-time assessments. Boundaries are how you guide and protect your life energy. The skillful use of boundaries allow us to create proximity, intimacy, distance.

In 2006, I stopped talking to my father. The details aren't as important as the fact that I was fed up with cycles of rage and a struggle, fundamentally, to be considered. This wasn't the first time I'd gone periods without speaking to him, but this was different. I wasn't punishing him this time by retracting myself. I was creating space from a place of accepting that he

wasn't, at least in that moment, going to shift—and without a shift I couldn't continue to engage. And for the first time, instead of maintaining reactivity to him, I settled. I focused instead on what need I longed for him to be able to fulfill, and strategized on how to otherwise get that need met. I wrote a letter saying as much to him, mailed it, and at the mailbox released expectations that anything at all would change.

In that decade of distance, I was fully resigned to never talk to him again. But the focus wasn't on talking to him or not talking to him as much as it was about recognizing that, behind whatever walls I might build, I longed for consistency in care, longed to be worth the risk of another's accountability. And instead of trying to force that in my parental relationship, I could seek it in my adult relationships, consciously and consensually.

In that, boundaries showed up one day as a revelation. A knowledge that emerged out of my own love practice with myself. Centered on the satisfaction of my own needs and yearnings, they clarified my relationships for me. I was carting my unconscious needs around less, looking to recreate my disappointment less. I was more often assessing the likelihood of satisfaction and creating opportunities for my needs to be met. I was trusting my assessments, disengaging earlier, when it became clear that I was only irritating my wound. And I learned, maybe most importantly, that there are degrees to engagement. I can titrate my vulnerability, my trust, the depth of connection without being inauthentic. Each relationship has its own unique recipe.

I celebrated my boundaries as a return of agency to my body. A practice of being present and honest.

Two years ago I called my father on a whim. I didn't plan it out, just picked up the phone because I was curious how he was. We talked for ten minutes, we gave the surface updates and hung up. Since then I've visited him maybe three times, all short porch visits—listening to my limits and honoring them. Last May, I was in my hometown for a morning and asked my father out to breakfast. Our longest visit to date. Over these years I've lost my reactivity to him. I think it's because I've also lost the need for him to change. I don't think this is for everyone and it is definitely not a stand-in for accountability. The lesson on boundaries was learned both in the distance and in the contact. We don't have to ever change the terms. But I

did, and that speaks to another possibility of boundaries. They can change.

I wrote a note on social media about our relationship and on forgiveness—which is still something I'm learning so much about. I also wrote on boundaries, defining them as "the distance at which I could love me and you simultaneously." A friend took that last line and meme'd it and, over the next week, I got to see just how much the definition resonated with people. I think we struggle with boundaries because we forget their purpose. They don't hold up when they are not coupled with the work of loving ourselves. We might succumb instead to love habits that keep us unsatisfied and grasping, or we might close off to connection altogether. Boundaries, then, cannot be a passive practice. Boundaries give us the space to do the work of loving ourselves. They might be, actually, the first and fundamental expression of self-love. They also give us the space to love and witness others as they are, even those that have hurt us.

TOOLS FOR ADDRESSING CHAPTER CONFLICT

Prepared by: Prentis Hemphill with support from the BLM Healing Justice Working Group

BLACK LIVES MATTER

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

When we understand the nature of conflict we can also understand that conflict between us, in our chapters, and within our network is an expected and common issue. Though many different ways of interacting often get conflated under the word conflict, we want to be clear on what conflict is and distinguish it also from violence and abuse, which we will talk about more in depth in a later tool.

In how we talk about addressing conflict specifically we want to be clear that none of guiding questions here are designed for instances of abuse. For our purposes here, we define abuse as a pattern of power and control over another through behavioral manipulation, coercion, and/or physical and sexual violence. Violence we might define as force both physical and structural that increase the probability of injury or death. For a toolkit to help address incidents of violence, you might use Creative Interventions toolkit, 'How to Stop Interpersonal Violence' (put a link in). It's a very comprehensive tool for approaching violence and designing and holding a community response. So we would land on a distinct definition of conflict as that which lives in the realm of disagreements, non-violent outbursts or behaviors, interpersonal disagreements.

Conflict can arise around political direction, ideology or places where we want others to

be accountable. We can be in conflict that feels personal, we rub each other wrong way. We can be in conflict around how a decision was made or how people in our chapters are stepping into leadership, are they disempowering or underaccountable. We can be in conflict along group lines, queer and trans people in chapters may feel invisible by members of the chapter. Conflict is vitally important for identifying where ruptures and misalignment live. For our collective culture, we want to get more practiced moving towards conflict well as opposed to avoiding it until situations become untenable or our organizing suffers. It's not easy, we may have few skills or experience to address it well, but with some grounding and some pre-thinking it's possible to develop a process that will support you in moving through it. Some pitfalls: Conflict often has the ability to make us zero in or hyper focus on the moment. We can lose sight of our relationship with the other person(s), their history or even attempts in the moment to rectify or resolve issues. Conflict pushes many of us into our life or death thinking, usually as a result of trauma that taught us that conflict is dangerous or that those who we engage in conflict with will destroy us or devalue us if given the chance. We also know that living in a police state that criminalizes dissent, that responds to mental health crises in our communities by incarcerating or even killing our family members and friends, that positions itself as an intervener in community conflict, abuse and violence impacts how we all engage in conflict. We may see few options for how to resolve conflict that don't include throwing each other way, trying to have power over by winning a disagreement, or we might even see conflict as proof of our own blame and lack of worth. All that we've internalized from systems of oppression show up to how we have conflict with each other.

A Note On Trauma

We want to understand that trauma is an important consideration in our healing, addressing conflict or coming up with interventions. Trauma can impact both the reactions we imagine are appropriate for a given situation and our interpretation and experiences of others' reactions and responses. It can also impact our capacity to to intervene without getting triggered. Trauma is an incredibly rich and complicated issue to explore and we'll create a tool focused entirely on understanding and addressing trauma soon.

Practice/Discussion

1. **Do you generally avoid or move towards conflict or arguments? Do you try to deescalate?**
2. **When was a time you engaged in conflict and were able to come to more understanding in the end? What happened that made that possible?**
3. **When was a time you engaged in conflict and were able to identify a boundary you needed with someone(s)?**

Understanding Triggers

Often we discuss triggers as anything that elicits an uncomfortable response. Feelings of pain, sadness, anger, even rage get talked about as indicators of triggers. These feelings, though uncomfortable, aren't necessarily indicators of that you're being triggered, but are often understandable emotional responses to conditions present in our lives and in the world. *A traumatic trigger is any stimulus that takes a person out of the present moment and into an unconscious reaction.* This is as likely to be triggered in conflict as it is in closeness or intimacy, so it's not necessarily safe to assume that all conflict will lead to triggering. This distinction is important as we start to understand collectively both the pervasiveness and specificity of trauma. Trauma is in direct relationship to time and our ability to access and live in our present moment, present relationships, present responsibilities. **If you are being triggered in conflict, this is an important indicator that you need support, either space from the situation or processing with someone you feel safe with.**

Examples of triggers

Someone grew up in home where a caretaker was volatile. To stay safe they would remain quiet, reading in their room, blocking out the noise until it was over. Now when they sense that someone might be angry (whether or not they are) or if there are people in the chapter engaged in conflict they will shrink, stop paying attention or drift away from meetings or responsibilities. A person who, when they were younger, had no caretaker they could depend on. They learned to stay protected by anticipating and winning fights. Now in groups, conflict feels like a threat to their safety, it triggers the feeling of being unprotected and they often blow up whenver someone disagrees with them. Without being aware of our own triggers, their origin, how trauma impacts our relationships, we may not be able to feel the difference between the options we had in our past and the options we have now to deal with conflict.

Direct Communication

For conflict that does not indicate more challenging issues like violence and abusive patterns, direct communication is often the most fruitful way of addressing it and intervening. When we talk about direct communication we are talking about our ability to state our understanding of what happened, the impact it had on us and the requests or boundaries that have emerged as a result. We can show our emotion, our hurt, anger, frustration while not trying to take away another's dignity or humanity.

A couple things to note is that for many of us whose life experiences have impacted our ability to trust, we often think we are engaging in direct communication but our actual intention might be to prove our “rightness” or make the other person feel bad, guilty or as upset as we feel. Yes, we are addressing the issue directly, but underneath is the threat of a fight if there’s a hint of pushback or danger.

Restorative Justice/Transformative Justice

We share as a network a guiding principle around restorative justice, which at its’ very core asks us to rethink conflict. It asks us to see conflict, not necessarily as the splinters that lead inevitably to division, but to think of conflict instead as a generative moment, an opportunity to learn something about each other and the systems that we’ve created together in our chapters. Restorative justice also doesn’t mean that all relationships can be restored after harm has happened. In fact, it could be argued that complete recovery of a relationship isn’t possible or necessarily desirable. We learn something new and useful every time we have conflict. Boundaries can and should be part of a restorative process and practice. Requests for someone to study, to seek support, to take time to focus on their healing can be powerfully restorative interventions. We may decide through a process to part ways, to make immediate boundaries and return to relationship after some time. Conflict must also change us and it must change the way we work together. Inside of every conflict are the dynamics of what caused that specfic rupture, but it also indicates for the chapter something that needs to be learned or shifted to avoid future conflicts, or to intervene sooner. A huge loss in group conflict is to stop at addressing the most immediate disagreement, every process should include learning for the collective. Below is a tool we are developing to help chapters understand their current conflict and engage in ways of addressing it that align with our guiding principles.

Facilitating or Leading a Process

We’re all out here doing the best we can with our resources, our skills, and with love for our people and this movement. More often than not we move into leading processes, supporting people when the moment demands and because no one else is there to support. This is how a lot of us have learned valuable lessons around holding space and simultaneously how many of us can get in over our heads. Most likely, this will be an undertaking in which other conflicts or revelations might emerge. It’s not a destination, but a process in which we can each develop our skills and communication.

Worksheet For Chapter Conflict

This can be used by the entire chapter and shared with the decided upon facilitator or can be used as a process to help anyone think through conflict. This isn't a plan but some questions to help you think through how to develop a plan to address conflict. These questions can also help guide individuals wanting to think through how they might intervene in what's happening in their chapter.

Assessing Now

- How would you characterize the conflict? What would you say is the central conflict or incident?
  What are the dynamics in the chapter that led to the conflict or impact ?
- Are there people being harmed?
- Would you characterize what is happening as violence? If so, you may need a
- more robust process. Please see Creative Interventions toolkit and reach out to BLM Healing Justice staff.
  Who or what body has the power to impact the conflict?
  What impact is this having on your chapter? Individual members, overall base, community?
  What does this conflict bring up for you? Trust, confidentiality, political
- alignment, power?
- Will your chapter make the time to address the conflict?
  Are mental health issues a factor? What resources are available to address them?

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Who Can Help

- Who in your chapter has the position and relationships, both distance and connection, to see multiple perspectives?
  Is there a healing justice body in your chapter that can support that person
- figuring out how to address the conflict?
  Are they willing to hold and lead a process or courageous conversation?

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- Are there any issues you would identify now on why the persons you identified might not be a good fit? Can these issues be addressed upfront?
- Are there people outside of your chapter who could offer support in the visioning? Be specific about what role you'd want them to play and why. Ex. Community healers or practitioners, network staff, etc.

Planning a Process

- What are the goals of the process or conversation?
- Have the goals been identified and agreed upon by the group?
- Do the goals address the source of the conflict, the overarching dynamics, and the impact on the whole?
  Are the goals restorative or transformative? Meaning, do they support learning, growth?
- Is there one issue, moment or misunderstanding that needs airing out? Can it be addressed in a single conversation with next steps?
- Are there several or subsequent incidents or larger dynamics that might point to the need for a process (several meetings both individual and as a group) over time?
- Are there aspects of this conflict or each other's stories that are important to keep in some level of confidence?
- Are there aspects that need to be shared with the community, with allied groups?
  Have you made any attempts to hold a conversation? What were your learnings form that?
- What is the impact of the process on the chapter? Are some people drifting away? Is there more that can be done to normalize the conflict and to get people to stay in if safety isn't a concern?
- Where will the process or conversation be held? Is it accessible, welcoming, private (if this is a condition) and is it relatively neutral? *Finding a location could be a request of a support team.*
- Who was invited, are they agreed upon and aligned with the chapter and network values?

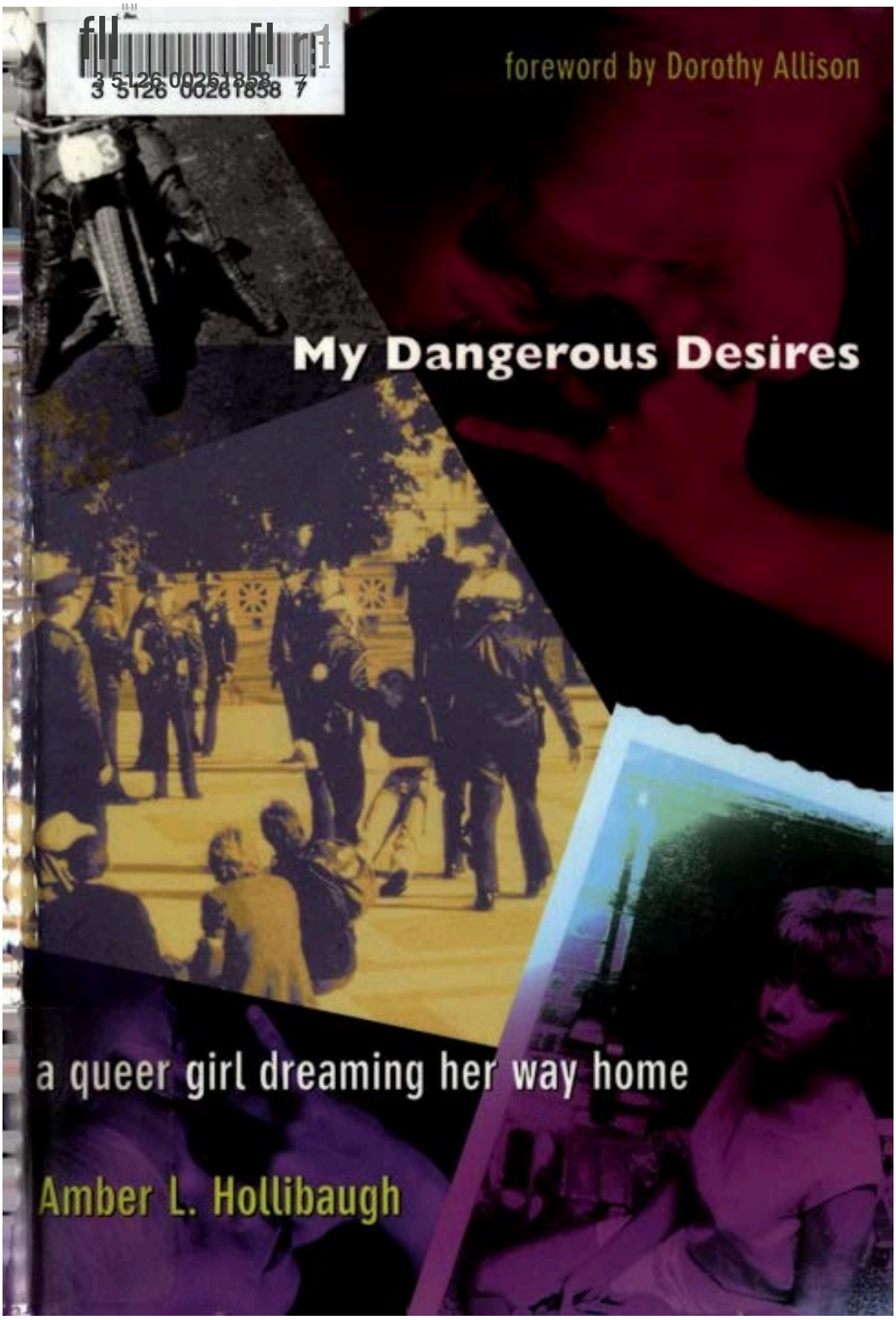
Next Steps & Follow-up

- Are there clearly defined next steps?
- Who do you need to support your chapters next steps? Other chapters, staff, allies?

What is Accountability? - From Creative Interventions

In brief, accountability is the ability to recognize, end and take responsibility for violence. We usually think of the person doing harm as the one to be accountable for violence. Community accountability also means that communities are accountable for sometimes ignoring, minimizing or even encouraging violence. Communities must also recognize, end and take responsibility for violence by becoming more knowledgeable, skillful and willing to take action to intervene in violence and to support social norms and conditions that prevent violence from happening in the first place.

Accountability is a process. It involves listening, learning, taking responsibility, and changing. It involves conscientiously creating opportunities in our families and communities for direct communication, understanding and repairing of harm, readjustment of power toward empowerment and equal sharing of power, and rebuilding of relationships and communities toward safety, respect, and happiness.


foreword by Dorothy Allison
My Dangerous Desires
a queer girl dreaming her way home
Amber L. Hollibaugh

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A Queer Girl

Dreaming Her Way Home

I have lived on the wrong side of sex since birth. This is both who I am and who I was meant to be, though it isn't all there is. I grew up a mixed-race, white-trash girl in a country that considered me dangerous, corrupt, fascinating, exotic. I responded to the challenge by becoming that alarming, hazardous, sexually disruptive woman. Most often this happened without a plan or a design.

My coming out as a high femme lesbian only added to the fears, lies, and misconceptions of those deeper, older experiences: of being born and marked inherently *other* because of the people who birthed me. This deviance, perversion, this otherness is woven into the fabric of my earliest experiences and memories, piercing the very sides of the dresser drawer my parents used for a crib.

We were motorcycle-riding poor-white (Irish) and dark-skinned (Romany) Gypsy trash. I was given birth by these particular men and women, people with their own complicated histories and deeply compromised choices. They are who I grew up loving. And this life, my life, has led me back to them again and again in order to confront and ultimately accept myself. I have needed to remember them, see them before me, in order to comprehend the world. They were not my choice, but they were my survival, what I required to endure, and to create a worldview layered with my fusion of sex and color and class.

When I look at the essays in this book, it seems to me that I have been building their very sentences for a long time, placing them like marks on the ground to utilize again some day for myself, so that I could travel back to the place I fled in fierce, hopeless love, dread, and nameless grief so many years before . . . back to my earlier self, to the towns and fields I grew up in, the memories and the nightmares I could tell no one, back to the smell of the places I hid to survive the

violence in my family, back to the child, staring at the skeleton of a future with no eyes in its sockets. No matter how rough, the terrain of my history is what I have always used to invent and understand my dreams, my sexuality, and my need to go home.

Going back isn't what started me writing, though; anger was—anger and loneliness. I was homesick for a place and a people I'd thought I hated—and angry at how my own uneven teeth, exhausted body, and physical scars still betrayed my origins. I was increasingly tired and furious at being in a middle-class world peopled with none of the bitter brilliance, powerful resilience, and savage survivors' humor I had grown up knowing and which I still relied upon in myself to keep my own life recognizable. I was tired of whiny movement women who seemed to want only what they thought the men of their class already possessed—rather than being amazed at the very privilege of their assumption and their "wanting" in the first place. *Tired* doesn't really capture it. I was sick at heart over a feminism and a Left driven by a deeply ungenerous disregard for difference. People in both movements had few skills to manage working with anyone whose life history fell outside a certain, very particular kind of whiteness, an imperious class confidence.

I was also scared. All the stories I could gather and spin at this rally or that conference seemed to be sending me further and further away from the person I knew myself to be. Where was I going in this new world, in the attempt to run away from the one I had fought so hard to escape? What exactly was I piloting myself into? This was a world that I had hungered for with such desperation, a world of books and language and bodies that didn't ache at the end of the day and certainly not at the beginning. I dreamed of a world away from the fear and desperation that had governed my own childhood. But where was this new life taking me? What kind of person was I becoming? I had trouble, sometimes, even recognizing myself. Whose language was now moving through my lips, whose images, whose truths and lies? Even the stories that had once seemed my own, as I repeated them in meetings and consciousness-raising groups, now seemed overdone in my ears, exaggerated in untruthful ways. The people I drew didn't smell like the people I knew—those human beings who were really the spine

and flesh of my history. They were too perfectly tragic, too comically downtrodden, too pathetic. I knew my mother would be disgusted. She would also be ashamed.

There was some terrible lying going on here. I existed in a circumstance where the only language for my own life was one of grave silence and profound omission. My own shame and confusion about who I was and where I'd come from kept me from thinking I could ever write or speak in public, could ever create a life of integrity for myself—one of the mind and the spirit, a life I could respect. I had never met another me in any of the movements I was a part of. This was, looking back, not because there weren't many of us there but because our experiences and histories were assumed to be nonexistent in those rooms and lecture halls and at those demonstrations. They weren't called for, weren't valued, weren't understood. Because of that I was alone in any room I entered, and I had no way to find others with corresponding lives full of the stories and laughter, the heat and undercurrents that propelled my own class, sex, and race history forward.

I don't mean this literally. I didn't need to meet up with another woman whose life was a cookie-cutter version of my own. Her language didn't have to roll from her mouth with the same phrases as my aunts and cousins and nieces, her poverty or pleasure need not trace precisely the same shapes as my own. What I longed to hear again was a *culture* of similar expectations and longings, of lives rooted in familiar desires and in the regular stories of simply desperate needs, understated and quite ordinary. I wanted a commonality of the skin and flesh in other women and men who had survived these commonplace terrors of existence and who still had a fierce desire to never forget. Who really understood that this *not forgetting* was a necessity, the core of their own survival, rather than just the bitter price paid.

I longed for a movement of other women who would still smell of sex captured in the back of a '56 Chevy or a Harley and a field. Who had an uncompromising taste for lovers with the power to map and navigate their own ferocious desires for going under in a female erotic context. I wanted a narrative with the texture of its sex drawn through the hands and mouth of a woman who would take your body under water with your arms held back at your sides until you gasped for breath, and still she wouldn't let you go. I wanted somebody here to howl with the

pleasure and the terror of the whole damned thing. I began to realize that I was hungry for *sound* in a class- and color-silent world. I operated alone here, hiding and remembering, and I had become afraid in a new way now about my own geography of desire and the curves and edges of my own sexual, racial, and economic history.

But the delinquencies of my upbringing and my desires only confirmed a deeper chronology of disturbing questions in which the ache for another woman's mouth was simply the most obvious crime I committed. My history didn't seem to fit together with the dreams I harbored and the movements I had joined. No one had to say it out loud. I knew it more clearly than anyone around me. Popular culture, casual remarks about "poor white trash" or about being "gypped," television humor and the empty bookshelves of the trailers and little houses I grew up in, all spoke it more expressively than any single assertion.

It's hard for me to remember those days before I had the hope of the Left—and then of women, of sisters, and beyond that of differently gendered women, a kind of third sex, who desired their own kind. My hope was for a revolution so complete that no one would ever have to face my life choices again. That was the context for my early activism, though I really didn't understand it as clearly then. It was the civil rights movement, the Left, and then women's liberation that broke the repetitive pattern of sameness, of small worlds and smaller hopes, in which I grew up and to which I seemed destined. How to tell people who have never felt that desperation what it meant to discover the world of ideas and imagination that is the basis of revolution. To rip yourself, literally, from the flat, minute range of alternatives poverty presents you with from birth and explode into revolution—grand, total, world transformation for yourself and for all the people you love, people you have had to leave behind in that trailer park in order to escape their fate.

Before the movement, I could only try to slip my dreams inside a wedding gown or onto a Harley Davidson. By the time I was eleven, I was nearly six feet tall, and my body suggested a sexuality I had yet to embrace. I had become a trophy girl at the Saturday night motorcycle track we went to each week. My father raced his bike or worked on the pit crews of his other male friends. At the end of a series of races the winners would be called onto the field for their prize. I would pull my

dress tightly around my hips and ride that big Hog out onto the center field. Leaving the bike, I would pick up every winner's trophy as his name was called, bringing each man his prize. As they accepted, each man in turn would pull my body into his across the tank of his bike, moving his mouth over mine. I dismissed their kisses. But I loved the feel of surrender in a public space and the crowd's approval. To be publicly claimed and taken—this was a perilous sexual energy which I could play with in that ridiculous spotlight. I would never be a prom queen or a good girl, but this offered me a kind of irresistible female claim to a distinguishing, edgy charisma and ironic magnetism, gave me an identity in the world. It was what I had. And I would learn, quickly, that every identity has its price.

By the time I was twelve, I was considered a whore and treated as one. Each boy who went out with me bragged about the ease of his sexual conquest on our first date—in order to match the lies of whatever boy had gone before him. In response, I began to date older men. Before my thirteenth birthday I began to see a thirty-three-year-old motorcycle mechanic, Hack Hackley, who raced bikes and was one of my father's best friends. I had my first full-time summer job, getting a pair of roller skates as part of my official uniform so I could start waitressing at the nearby drive-in hamburger stand.

Most everything I craved then was fiction and excitement. I hungered for men with the same indiscriminate longing for escape and improbable meaning I attached to all my fantasies. The endless romance I sought, the life I wanted, was epic and filmy, not what it really was: a few strung-together drive-in movie moments in the back seat of some guy's car. I had measureless Technicolor illusions, gaudy and without focus, dreams of ecstasy, of seamless joy and perfect escape, of having a beauty I didn't possess and a power I couldn't command.

I read Harlequin romances and *Love* comics in piles, devoured all I found. I wouldn't have known a "good" book if it had materialized next to my bed—and I probably wouldn't have been interested. Those novels fit my urgency and my terror of the real world perfectly. Even when it began to dawn on me that I wanted women, these books stayed central to my imagination. I merely adjusted their gender. Or I didn't notice. It wasn't the sex of the men in these books which compelled me; it was the man's total power to define and control the world around

him. It didn't seem remotely possible for a woman like myself to play that role, to determine or control the world. These were gendered fables of class and power, and I was completely willing to believe in love as my answer. I also accepted the feminine angles of romance, the stance of ultimate receptivity. At this, I imagined myself a master.

The Harlequin books always featured mousy, unnoticed women (beautiful underneath the frump), women with a limp or a withered arm, secretaries who could take shorthand at 120 words a minute. Women who were otherwise rudderless or without skills, women in pain and grief over an unrecognized life or an impossible love. Whatever else they were, these books were closer to a literal description of myself and my lack of options than most other books or magazines around, from *Reader's Digest* to *Family Circle*. Those narratives abounded with stories of women who were upbeat, heroic, optimistic, talented. The babes in my Harlequin books had nothing going for them except the secret of their inner ability to express love and faithfulness to a male partner who was disillusioned by the world. Even today when I'm sad or hopeless, I find myself yearning to sink into one of those books.

The only other thing I believed in was acceleration. On the back of any too-fast-moving motorcycle, or sitting next to any driver with a foot pressed flat on the gas pedal of a furious car, I felt released inside, free in a suspended span of pleasure. It was only that physical force which proved itself equal to the task of sublimating my fantasies.

In the middle of this dream-laden life, I was filled with directionless longings. I dreamed without any differentiation in my aspirations, my possibilities, or my needs; I would become a nurse, or win a million dollars in Vegas, or be sought out by a classy girls' college in Connecticut. I would be discovered and become a famous movie star. I would marry Elvis. I would move to Placerville, move to Europe. My father would stop touching me. I would get married before I got pregnant. I would wake up happy.

Each vision I conjured seemed urgent, yet I lived my daily life without any of the knowledge or tools necessary to make a real escape. I lacked both the ambition and the strategy to elude the creeping reality that hardened around me like cement with each passing season. Even more crucially, I lacked an interior world that might have helped me

create or develop an authentic way out. I lived daily with a deepening recognition of the hopelessness of my prospects, filled with an increasing hysteria as I watched the door squeaking shut on my chance to do anything different than the generations of women who had gone before me. Mostly, I slept.

I had always used sleep as an answer. No one in my family could find me in the rural fields surrounding our trailers or houses, and I would lie sleep-eyed by the hour, the day. I knew early on that imagination and daydreams were the most expressive reality I had. The magical power of my storytelling father, the laughter and intelligence of my mother, could not offset the equal doses of family violence and despair that settled into a pattern I was helpless to alter. My mother was full of an inarticulate rage that seemed to be calmed only by the whippings she performed on me daily. My father's, brother's, and uncles' endless sexual desire for any female in the family, neighborhood, and county were commonplace. Our overall poverty could not be escaped. There was no place to hide from the rigid anger of my mother's mute disappointments, her body of female bitterness, or the sexual vapor which emanated from all the men. No room had locked doors. No child would have been allowed to use a lock if there had been one. And I was the only young girl of the brood who survived.

Throughout my childhood, both my parents struggled to provide a kind of imaginary sorcery which they hoped I might use to rescue myself from our existence as throwaway people. Their aspirations for me were of an existence not decimated by despair or bitterness, and they worked each day to provide, with their willpower, what they could not provide with their capital. They were each totally committed to this project in their own ways, attempting to wrest for me a different kind of childhood than they had known, to fabricate from their own resistance something better for their daughter. But that could not obscure all the other forces arising, not simply from economics but from within each of their individual personalities. Each of my parents was both my ally and my betrayer—strange fusions of shelter and hazard. My father remained the only faulty protection I had against my mother's daily violence; my mother was the hoped-for, utterly failed hope against my father's sexual violations. I was the child both of their

potential and their tragedy, the product of their dangerous pathologies and of their intense allegiance. My only way to escape their fate was with their help. It was a help they had no idea how to provide. Still, it was a help they were desperate to furnish me.

Poverty is a terrible educator and a worse psychologist. The pathologies each of my parents struggled to subdue in themselves are mute testimony to the power of the human spirit and to its vulnerability. Willpower alone could never conquer the rivers of anger and grief each had sustained in their own paths to adulthood. No love of me, or of each other, could erase the marks of that historical stream; its waters eventually overlapped everything else in our universe.

That's partly why I can barely remember the literal and commonplace events of my childhood. It is what makes the bulk of each memory so conflicted, bordered with shadowy menace and a violent edge. This first became obvious to me when the women's movement began and I entered my first consciousness-raising group. The anger in those groups as we remembered arrogant or abusive fathers, brothers, and male cousins was palpable. But the collective reconstruction of our mothers was only allowed to be tragic. I didn't know what to do with those few memories I could pull forward—not of my father's hand striking me, but of my mother's. Of her face brutally set in the daily anger she shared with the only other female in her galaxy: her daughter. Her terrible sadness and fury, a sadness and fury I increasingly understood as I got older and faced the same choiceless expanse she could never escape. She had given birth to her first child at the age of fourteen, had seen that child die and its father desert her before her sixteenth birthday. This scarred her life with a traumatic, savage sorrow that no one and nothing could ever alter. I loved her desperately, even though I feared her far more than I feared my father. I have never known how to write this part of the story: of my loving and fearing her all rolled up in a package whose pieces are not distinct. What can I make of these recollections clouded with childhood loneliness and female-driven violence? It was my mother who hid in bushes watching me as I played. My mother who could not cry.

Yet she was also the dazzling female icon of my childhood, gunning the engine of her motorcycle in our front yard, her bleached blonde hair wild as she pushed that motorcycle faster to match and

challenge my father, who was furiously racing his own bike down the back roads of California. I sat behind him on those trips, laughing at the speed and joy of it all, alive with her beauty racing alongside. I loved it when she rode that motorcycle up to the front of my school to pick me up, on those days she wasn't driving a school bus through our county to gather up or drop off other kids. She was as wild as my father but more relentless. She would take a dare farther, ride faster, lay her bike almost parallel to the road when rounding a corner, wear the highest fuck-me pumps with the tightest leather jacket I ever saw—it curved seamlessly around her body.

The first time they put me on Dad's bike I was a year old. They laid me over a pillow tied to the gas tank, and I rode between my father's arms. People thought we were crazy. Throughout the 1950s we rode as a family, belonged to a motorcycle club all the years I was growing up. My father rebuilt bikes, raced dirt bikes, speed bikes. The family did long-distance runs. We piled children into old beat-up pickup trucks and onto the back of every bike in our club. We built a special box for the dog, which we attached to the front of Mom's motorcycle when we went camping. Even in California in the 1950s, even among other poor families, we stood out.

But none of this could detract from the dominant cycles of unhappiness and unanswerable need which perpetually surrounded our family. Sometimes there were five children, sometimes only me. Children in the brood moved between households and adult family members like fish in a pool, living first in this wild pocket, sometimes beneath that rock. I tended to stay put because my parents stayed together, but for most of the children living with us it was a sometimes thing. I would come home from school, and there would be four where, in the morning, there had been only me. They would stay for months or years; then they would be gone abruptly. New cousins emerged, left, returned.

In our home there was only one other consistency besides poverty, and that was racism. The slash of it rode against my father's copper skin and Romany heritage, and it functioned like a poison river through the construction trades in which he struggled to make a living. His beauty was different, red-brown, distinct. This was a person born by the side of a river, who had traveled in Gypsy caravans until he left

women literal and imagined, I was on his list of personal lusts. I felt his heat and his need, and I feared saying no—as if I could have—risking the loss of both father and mother if I resisted.

I did what I could. I hid from each of them whenever possible. There was a crawlspace beneath our home that became the closest shelter I could find from his pursuit and her turbulent hand. It was just under the window in my bedroom, and I could slip out there in seconds to lay silent until the house was still again. I spent too many hours of my childhood huddled there next to my dog, crying and dreaming of a different life, a safe life, with the same father and mother I loved, imagining them transformed this time, fixed, repaired. I would finally be safe . . . safe.

So it is no wonder to me that I crave both safety and peril in equal amounts and that these two qualities are wedded in my psyche like twin sides of the same desire. That *is* desire for me. I know that all women try to construct a shell of safety for their desires, a shape for their sexuality which allows it to flourish even in the midst of this mess. It is necessary for any woman who wants to survive her own capacity for heat and surrender to find a way to play with power in its many manifestations. I would discover it slowly through the construction of my own high femme identity—and the butch corollary. It was there, in butch gender-fuck, that I could see my own femme drag queen self. Bigger than life, turning gendered bodies inside out, shooting them through with the ironies that have always contradicted biology, the dreamed-about spheres of the possible.

Before this, though, there was no sexual focus in my world—certainly not in my teenage world—that actually seemed my own: neither my mother's frozen refusal nor my father's thoughtless pursuits. I knew only that traditionally gendered bodies failed to excite me. There was the lingering, unanswered question of the kiss I could never find, the kiss I had never known. To be embraced by a different kind of being, an unimaginable and unnamed female gender trickster, someone physically skillful, masculine but fluid, sexually confident, her mouth pulling my own body across the tank of a motorcycle, center field, after the race—longing without words to give it breath.

An extraordinary world for me, butch/femme. But my route to this hidden erotic system was in no way direct. It came later. How to

have my mother's wild beauty and my father's ferocious sexual power and intensity? A woman's relentless mouth and a cock deep inside my body. How? The desire which finally began to correspond to my interior imagination was first spoken to me by butch women who were quiet, hurt, twisted up in their hearts, deeply fearful, razor sharp, tender gender foreigners. Those women seemed to spring from the same deeply troubled, captivating pool that had given me birth. From the first time I saw butch women, they were the only satisfying complement to and corresponding reflection of my own image, my own eros. In their bodies, their complex genders, their eyes, the power of their hands and mouths, the wonder of their hands and their cocks, I could ride through and sink inside my history with all its humiliations, force, and beauty. I could find refuge. They could take me under. Through the sheer power of their desire for another woman they could take me home.

The world is only as vast as our comprehension of it. The circumstances and possibilities of our desires remain impossible when they are unimaginable. In my life, now, I am struck by the fact that the universe in which I currently reside is one which I could never have imagined as a lonely preteen trophy girl, barely avoiding pregnancy, skimming the surface of her own death. I didn't even know what I didn't know. There is no map for an invisible world, no path out of a closed system, no name for undefinable hope or longing.

As I grew, so did my wildness and increasingly mean-spirited rebellions. At twelve, I finally told my mother about my father's sexual attacks on me throughout childhood. She called me a liar; she refused to question him. She believed, I think, that her own survival was intrinsically tied to her economic and emotional relationship with him—and nothing would ever alter that terrible, necessary perception. As I grew into a ferocious teenager, my mother became desperate. We fought relentlessly. I no longer bothered ducking her hand or avoiding her voice, and I didn't hesitate to retaliate, either, whenever I could. I began searching out ways to hurt her. I could no longer afford to remember that I loved her. She had made her choices clear: we were not allies against my father's uncontrolled sexuality. So my mother and I fought, enemies as only survivors on the edge can become.

The turning point came when I fought back physically. She had

slapped me across the face; I stepped right into it and struck her, hard, as she stood before me. (I can still feel her skin on my hand.) It had been building for months—all our arguments about my staying out with men or women, coming home irregularly, nearly flunking out of high school. I was riding a downward cycle my mother knew only too well. Whatever else was true, however bitter things were between us, she did not want this to happen to me.

I was fifteen when she found a list of ads for private boarding schools in the back of a *Vogue* magazine she'd read in some doctor's waiting room. She knew nothing about these schools, but she was desperate enough to surreptitiously tear the page out and bring it home. Then she wrote to each school, requesting information about scholarship programs. And she filed applications for me to each one that replied. Six months later I was accepted into a newly created "low-achiever/high-IQ" scholarship program at the American School in Lugano, Switzerland. I left California for the first time in my life and boarded the first airplane I had ever been on, flying to Europe. For the trip, I tinted my bleached-blonde hair with a vaguely pink rinse to match the magenta suit I would travel in. I was ready, all right: a poor white-trash girl with impossible fantasies. It seemed to me, then, that all my endless daydreams were about to come true, that the effortless life and release I'd longed for were about to be mine. I imagined that I was about to be freed somehow from the poverty and insignificance of one world and released magically into another—a new world that, I imagined, would welcome and discover me, desire me, treasure me completely, without violence or violation.

The reality was more brutal than I could have anticipated. Touching down in Lugano, I found myself at a school for slightly rebellious ruling-class children on their way to Harvard or Vassar. The school itself was a castle, a set of imposing, sculptured gray stone buildings on the palatial grounds of an estate. The rooms were enormous, harsh, stately, cold. I had escaped my old world, but I was completely alone there, without any idea about how to survive the vast psychological distance left to travel. Nor did I have the slightest idea of how to go about visiting the opera in Milano, reading Chaucer in Middle English, or traveling to Paris for the weekend.

Humiliations began early: no one wanted to share a room with

this smelly new girl whose clothes, they said, were "like trash." Despite their mild attempts at rebellion, these kids knew exactly how crucial it was to bunk with the son or daughter of Costa Rica's president instead. I was saved from complete isolation and ridicule only because the most affluent girl in school—another misfit, but a very sophisticated one, a pipe-smoking, gender-bending child of the American South, whose father owned the largest blanket-manufacturing company in the world—befriended me.

I lasted there less than a year. In that time I was forced to realize the dimensions of a world I would never possess, never be invited to join. Paradoxically, it was at that school where I was first introduced to the Left, to the ideas of Marx, to the notion of civil rights and of protest movements. My favorite teacher, himself a first-generation son of Lebanese immigrants and a graduate of Dartmouth, was—unbeknownst to the school—also a member of the Communist Party of America. I approached him in tears one day, ashamed and desperate because my grades were so terrible. He told me that I was never meant to be at that school in the first place. Then he handed me *The Communist Manifesto* to read. I did. It was the first thing I'd ever come across that talked about material possessions and the lack thereof, about something called *the working class*, and it began to finally make sense, for me, of my family's poverty, of the circumstances that had controlled our lives and which—especially at that school—seemed to disgrace me so. It enabled me to stay, and to struggle through, and barely—just barely—to graduate. I became the first person in my family with a high school diploma.

I returned to California an awkward and self-conscious sixteen-year-old, bitter toward both parents. I had seen all they couldn't give me—things my schoolmates had effortlessly with a month's allowance or a well-placed phone call. Humiliating as the past year had been, it had also made it impossible for me to stay in my hometown for good, impossible for me to forget the tantalizing taste of possibility, of different ways to be in the world. *I had been away.* A learner. A student of great ideas. Having taken the trip outside, I was forever changed by it. Now I had to leave. It was just a matter of when.

In that first strange month of my being back home, my parents built me a desk and shelves for all my books. They framed a map I had

brought back of the Parthenon, bought me bookends and a study light. None of us knew what I was supposed to do with these things; they just seemed required somehow, now that I was a high school graduate and the owner of such large, impressive-looking tomes. Those books were my trophies, the stuffed heads on my wall; they were proof that the sacrifice had somehow been worth it. My parents were awed by them, held them in a kind of reverence and dread. And—without admitting it—so did I.

We circled those bookshelves like wary hounds after large and frightening prey. I would shut the door to my little room and open their pages, leafing through them again and again. They reminded me that I had been somewhere else. And, to my parents, they were a sign of how I had become different, how I had traveled without them to places they could not imagine. We had grown irrevocably apart. I was no longer duplicating the motions of women in my family. Now, it was clear, I was becoming a different kind of survivor.

A week after the shelves were up and the books in place, I returned home in the middle of the day to find my mother in my room. She had taken all the books out and spread them around her, some half open, some with crumpled pages as if they'd been thrown there, and she was surrounded. And she was crying—my mother, who had never cried in front of me. I stood on the threshold, too stunned to speak. We stared at the books and at each other. Finally, she said, through all the tears, "I don't understand any of these books, nothing that's in them, nothing they say. How can you read them if I can't? Who do you think you are?" Then, still crying, she left.

A short time later, I left, too.

For many years I was a nomad. By 1965, I'd hitchhiked often, routinely, across the United States. A stripper, prostitute, drifter, dreamer, revolutionary. And, for many years, revolution and the dream of it were enough. The civil rights movement that exploded in America with the Freedom Summer of 1964 gave many of my own longings voice, and I was honored to be a part of it, working for a short time as a member of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) in Mississippi. No power I have ever encountered is as comprehensive as the human dream of changing the world. It was a dream as big as my needs and my vision and as radical. I knew instinctively that it was merely the bot-

tom line before real possibilities could emerge. And, at sixteen, I was ferocious in my love of possibilities. It's a fierceness I've never lost.

After participating in the Mississippi Freedom Summer, I lived in New York City for a while. I lived in Berkeley, California, in its heyday during the 1960s. I was a United Farm Workers organizer. I belonged to two communes, snuck desperate men trying to escape the U.S. Army across the Canadian border, marched in protest against the Vietnam War in cities all over the country, laid in front of Black Panther offices late at night to keep police from firing inside, and got my first tear gas mask at eighteen to use in the street riots I regularly joined. Then, late at night, I did sex work. Prostitution made it possible for me to afford an existence most middle-class and upper-middle-class radicals I knew assumed as inherently theirs by right.

The 1960s was an amazing time in this country, an explosion of previously unstated yearnings, hope, and fury. It was a historical unearthing of the truer principles that built and organized our lives, not the rhetoric of jingles, mantras, all the banal shortcuts we'd been forced to learn to stay alive: "land of the free," "bring me your cold, your tired, your poor," "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps," etc. This is a land with a powerful language of choices and freedom, yet it offers only the wealthy liberation from fear and need and silence. It is a nation constructed upon a complicated history of theft and slavery, of racism and hatred for women. And it is layered with a deep tradition of betrayal toward far too many woman, children, and men. Poverty is this country's dirty little secret, profit its foundation. It took me too many years to find this out.

Some things in your background never go away; they are both a burden and a tool of survival. Sex as labor—as earned income—was one of them for me. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when I didn't have paid movement jobs, I worked in the sex trades. I told no one, not my commune members, nor my best friends, and no one ever asked; they just assumed that I got my money like they did—that I, too, was a graduate student who taught huge classes, received a monthly check written by well-to-do parents, maybe drew income from a family trust fund or some other long-standing inheritance. It didn't matter. I lived my movement life with all those impossible movement hours but never attended college. I remained alone with this sense of myself

as an outsider (even though I was secretly very proud to be the first member of my family to ever actually graduate from high school).

I worked sucking men off or stripping in old vaudeville houses in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Boston, Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto. I worked in roadhouses if I was desperate enough or in classier burlesque houses when I'd decided to stay put for a while. The trade adapted well to my radical life. Every city has a strip joint, and I was young and white and had a great body for the work. I was also profoundly angry at men, which only enhanced and embellished my shows.

I had learned to do Hawaiian dance, along with all the half-Hawaiian children growing up alongside me in the farm valleys of California. Hawaiian women who had married white GIs during World War II and moved to the mainland wanted to teach their children their traditions and language. The participation of mongrels like myself made it "American," and all the kids in my area did it. Dance school wasn't how my family could enhance childhood; Hawaiian dancing was.

Early on I used that skill to become a showgirl in Vegas, making real money for the first time in my life and gaining my first sense of personal power over men. It was revealing for me. The women in my family were survivors who had no real authority since they could never determine the bottom line and live it. They couldn't afford to. Men were the bottom line—until I started dancing in Vegas, Stateline, and Reno. Onstage for that hour or more, I could move men's bodies back and forth as I wanted, could make them ask, beg, sweat. I could create something they wanted to touch and taste and hold. I gained a power I had never before possessed. I could hold their wanting in my hands. And I could refuse them. Heady stuff.

Dancing, stripping, hooking were all pieces of that logic. I had pleasure; I had work; I could tell the difference. It was hard work, but it wasn't as bad as picking tobacco leaves in the fields of Connecticut, where the edges of the leaves cut your hands and nicotine sap soaked into the cuts so they never healed. It was a lot better than harvesting hops in Bakersfield or ironing clothes in the backrooms of a dry-cleaning plant in Houston, better than working the night counter at the Donut Shoppe in Folsom, packing ice-cream cones into boxes as

they came off the line in Chico, or ending up pregnant at fifteen. I understood early, and with unclouded eyes, about options.

But what did my escape into the Left mean, in practical terms? I had no tools to truly access this new world, no language or experience to use which would afford me entry. I was inarticulate. And humiliated at my own ignorance. So I slept with men in the Left just to overhear their conversations about Marx and the foundation of capital. I fucked them without hope of ever being good enough for them to love. But still I learned. I wrote down the titles of the books that lay around their beds, spilled out of their bookshelves. Then I went home and read. I gave those men what I knew how to give, and they took it without ever seeing me. They were a different kind of customer, though I didn't see it that way then. Of course I wanted them to think me brilliant, worthy, valuable enough to be remembered for more than a night. But I didn't expect that. Sex was my tuition, and I paid it willingly.

RALPH'S BEACH PARTIES
1994–2000

RALPH HOPKINS with
GILI RAPPAPORT !!!

with fashions by
Everett Clark
Lonie Cisco
Wa Renee

THEY CALL ME AT RIIS BEACH

Anthology Editions, New York

Of his first fashion show party, Ralph's White Oasis Beach Party (1994), Ralph Hopkins describes a scene of walking on water and shining like diamonds in the sun. Mylar, his runway fabric, lays a pathway to unseen beauty. Gradually, community members watch more and more captivating performances on this fabric, while basking in the hot sun in the summer sky and wearing beautiful colors, basically half naked, side by side. Feeling relaxed. Ralph Hopkin's beach parties, runway, and flags invite us into this landscape. His work links our eyes to our hearts, our reality to our possibilities.

Part I: Gili interviews Ralph. *SoFA Journal (Social Forms of Art Journal)* published the original interview in their Fall 2021 issue. Brooklyn, New York. November 2, 2021.

Gili Rappaport, Green Flash Projects (they/she): Will you tell me a little about yourself? Where are you from?

Ralph Hopkins (he/him): I grew up in Greenwich Village in Manhattan. A lot of my friends don't know, but I went to art schools in Newark [New Jersey]. When I was younger, I thought I was going to be a commercial artist. My mother and I ended up having a little restaurant in Newark.

It was called Bernice's Snack Bar.

I worked there as a cook.

Gili: Was your family in the restaurant business?

Ralph: No. Prior to [opening the restaurant] my mother was a beautician, my grandmother was a beautician, and my cousin was a beautician. The beauty parlor was in my grandmother's house [that she owned], on the ground floor. My mother got tired of it, so she decided to open up a re s t aurant .

Gili: When did you start throwing parties at Riis Beach?

Ralph: In about 1994, I was on Riis Beach with my friends, and we were saying maybe we should have a little party. Just as friends, everybody brings a drink, food, or something like that. Everybody comes in white. It would be pretty on the beach. So I thought: Okay, let me get to work. From then on, it was always the third Sunday in August.

Gili: How about the decorations? Didyou do them yourself?

R alph: Yes. I liked to make the party look asnice as possible. I knew this area [in Manhattan] where they sell discount toys down the street from Macy's. I went there and I bought two dozen hula hoops. Then I looked up a balloon rental place on the East Side of Manhattan, and I rented balloons with the machine that blows them up.

On the day of the party, I buried the hula hoops halfway in the sand, so only half stuck out. I tied white balloons to each hula hoop so they would float in the air. We brought food, and I cooked a little. My friends bought drinks and food and we put it all out on a little small table. I brought my little boombox, and we had some music. We had a nice time, and everybody said: wow. Other friends saw and wanted to join. They said: next year we've got to do another one, we had so much fun.

The next year was a white party again, only much bigger.

The second party was at least 75 people. Then beach people started to notice. At the beach, they said, "What kind of party is this here?" To make it sound nice, I said, "This is my birthday" so they would be more lenient. We hid drinks in the cooler. A couple of friends started to put my parties on the internet. I said "Oh my god." I was getting a little nervous. I didn't know it would get big like that. So I said, 'I got to up my game with the decorations'. I had to get into my art mood. I went to the lumber place, and I picked up six ten-foot poles. They could barely get in my living room. I went to the fabric store and got yards of fabric. It was only a dollar a yard at that time. I had fabric from the top of the poles all the way down into the sand. I also had ribbon that I got at this warehouse, where a friend of mine worked, luckily. Everything was falling into place. As I walked into the warehouse, I felt like I was walking into a wonderland. All these treasures, everything was in this place. He said, 'Go take what you need, what do you want?' It was donated stuff.

That's where I found my runway. It was a mylar fabric that coiled. It looked like walking on water. I still have the runway.

I found this glitter ribbon, which shined like diamonds in the sun, like real diamonds.

You could see it from across the bridge coming to the beach, that's how they shine. So I added those to the top of the poles as decorations. Then I had to rent some tents. For the first party, we made our own tents. Through the years, it got bigger and bigger.

I had to get three more tents—real tents—for the models to change. And I had to get a permit, because I had a DJ and I had a generator.

Gili: So the parties happened once each summer?

Ralph: Always the third Sunday in August.

Gili: Did you have a name for them?

Ralph: Ralph's Beach Party. Every time I got the permit, they said I had to give a company name. I can't remember what I said at the time, so they started using my name, Ralph Hopkins. I paid them $50 for a permit to have these big tents on Riis. Luckily, I was friendly with the guy who was the head of the permits so he said, "Okay, Ralph." Every other year.

Gili: Did you feel any fears when making these parties?

Ralph: The main thing that made me nervous was the weather — I couldn't

cancel the party and reschedule if it rained because I was working! And the food was already cooked, and I couldn't do that again. Luckily it never rained at any of my parties!

Gili: Where did the clothes come from?

Ralph: I found friends of mine who were students at FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology]. I said, "Would you like to be one of my models?" And they said, "Fine, sure." One friend of mine worked at FIT, and he said, "I can get more models for you if you need," and he'd bring me the clothes. I said "You never know if somebody will buy your things, you never know who's in the crowd." So they donated their time and knew other students that had their own clothing lines, so they donated their time too. I had four or five designers. Through the years, it got bigger and bigger. The main designer was my friend Everett Clarke. Others were friends of his, students at FIT. They would design outfits that you had never seen before. Another designer was named Wa Renee. That was the name everyone knew him as. He died years ago. Like a male Grace Jones. Very out there, very futuristic clothes he used to wear. Very famous in the community.

Gili: Would you say it was mostly the same community who was hanging out at Riis Beach at that time? Or was it other people from the city who were coming there?

Ralph: People would come out to Riis, every week, every day of the week. After the word got out on the internet, they were coming from DC, upstate New York, and other places that are outside of New York. And the Bronx. People were bringing me gifts because they thought it was my birthday party! They were coming up to me and saying, "Oh, happy birthday Ralph, happy birthday." I said, "It's not my birthday, my birthday is in May." Memorial Day, May 30th. But I'd say, "Okay, nobody can say I can't have my birthday party months later. So this is my birthday party." I never even met these people that would bring me really nice gifts! Bracelets, vases—which I still have. And some gave me some money, which shocked me.

Gili: Because they wanted to thank you for throwing the party?

Ralph: They would say, "Thank you so much." Even up to this day they say, "You know, I met my girlfriend, I met my boyfriend at your party." "Your parties were so good, I had so much fun." Everybody was nice. I never had any fights.

Gili: Will you describe a typical party day?

Ralph: My DJ would come, the show started at three o'clock. Sometimes he would come a little late. He started playing as we were putting down the runway. The models were in the tents getting ready. I was getting ready too, because I opened. At the first parties I would close the fashion show too, with a show.

Gili: What was your show? Were you dancing, or walking?

Ralph: I walked. I did "Goldfinger" by Shirley Bassey. She's one of my favorite singers and I'm a James Bond fanatic, and I love *Goldfinger*. So I came out in all gold. Complete sequin gold bikini, with my body in gold dust all over me, a gold mask. I had six guys that I wrapped in gold mesh. They came out before me like as the music started. And they would have in the fist

of their hands, gold dust, which I still have some of that. And I told them, “Hold it in your fist to the very end. You will spray the gold dust all over everybody in the crowd.” I came out in the middle of them and touched each one of my dancers while the music played "Goldfinger", because I’m Goldfinger.

Another time, I came out as a pimp. And

that

was to the music "Money, money, money." It was a coat with a long train. And I had a pimp hat on, and a fist full of fake money and real money. I threw the money into the crowd, and they were scrambling for the money. It was fun. I had six other dancers in that one. They came out before me and I wrapped them in green mesh. Connected to the mesh was dollar bills all over the body.

They went out and I told them to face the crowd. They handed out fake money to the people in the crowd until I came out.

Gili: Why did you throw the party at the end of the summer instead of the beginning?

Ralph: At the end of the summer everybody has their deepest tans. So their bodies look really pretty. So I said, “Everybody come in white.” White balloons and everything.

When they said “Do you want to have another one?” I said, “Okay, one more, we’ve got to change the color.” That’s why we moved to red, blue, and neon.

Gili: Was it always one color?

Ralph: That was the thing—I called it the color code. If the color code was blue, it was shades of blue. And we had another that was called Circus by the Sea. I told my friend, “I need a ringmaster’s hat,” and he knew how to make the hat. He also made a big ringmaster’s red coat. He made it in my hallway because it’s so big with a long train.

At a fashion show you want to see really exotic, beautiful things that you’ve never seen before. I wanted you to know that I knew you were coming. I wanted something for you to see that you hadn’t seen before. And to have a good time, and feel that you’re part of it.

Gili: Why is that important to you?

Ralph: It makes people want to come back for more—they want to see more. See something you have never seen before. You know? I’ve always liked dressing up, even when I was small. I love fashion. People who know me now, the clothes that I wear, you don’t see that with regular guys. The way I put it together. I don’t do it to show off. This is me, that’s just how I am. I like different things. People see me and ask me how old I am. No one can ever believe I’m 73.

Gili: Did you realize that we are both wearing fleece today?

Ralph: Oh! I didn’t even notice that we matched.

Gili: It seems like you were born with a sort of innately radiant sense of style. What’s your philosophy on personal style?

Ralph: When I sit on the beach, people walk up to me, and they notice my necklaces and my stones. I get a lot of compliments. I wear it because it makes me feel good and has good energy. I’ve been doing this for many years with stones. People know me for my stones.

Gili: What is your setup like at the beach on a regular day?

Ralph: I only have my king-sized white sheets. I’m the only one. Been doing it for years.

Gili: The beauty of a simple white sheet.

R alph: I feel confined in a chair. I like to stretch out, and I can have guests come. I have room, I have a king size sheet. For my friends I say, “No, sit down. I got room.” I’ve always been like this. I know so many people on the beach. They call me the Mayor at Riis Beach.

Gili: And where on the beach do you usually sit?

Ralph: It’s the end of the beach where most of the gays sit. Mixed people sit, which I call the Village. Years ago, they used to be numbered back then. That was bay one. Back in the late 1960s. That was mostly African Americans, Latinos, and a few whites.
Through the years it started changing, different people started coming to that area. And you had a mixed group of people who would start coming here. But it has always been nice, no fights.

Gili: Have you ever felt tension within the communities at Riis?

Ralph: You know, when I started to experience tension—or even have any conflict—it was mostly when the beach was nude. It was nude twice over the years. The first time it was nude was the mid 1960s. One girl I knew saw a guy had a camera hidden inside of a boombox. She went up to him. She pulled out a knife, she’s like, “Give me that film.” Everybody was watching. He got nervous and he opened up the boombox and the camera was in there. He had to pull out the film. She took the film and she stretched it out. And everybody started clapping! But now, most people are half nude anyway. You know, g-strings, the girls are topless. Nobody’s bothering anybody. For me, it comes down to fun.

Gili: How does it feel for you now to be there? How does the community at Riis feel now—compared with how it felt then inthe 1960s?

R alph: Well, comparing the beach now withthe way it used to be, back then 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s: it was a more up feeling, and more fun. The different outfits, people would just come out with robes on. And girls who had fabulous bikinis that you would see in Bergdorf Goodman or Saks Fifth Avenue. Stuff like that. Some models used to come out there back then. You would catch a famous model sitting in the area. The atmosphere was morefun. On the boardwalk there was more restaurants where you could eat seafood. And game rooms.

You didn’t feel threatened with all of it, you could go to the boardwalk, nobody would bother us. Today, there is a younger crowd coming in to the Village area. They’re really nice. They’re in their own little groups. It’s different. But it’s still very nice. Now we are getting a lot of people from Manhattan coming here now from Staten Island and on the ferry boats from Lower Manhattan. The crowd at Riis you don’t see at Fire Island or Coney Island. With the kind of clothes and dresses . . . it’s just more fun at Riis.

Gili: How do you feel about the abandoned Neponsit Beach Hospital Building [which operated as a tuberculosis sanatorium from 1915 to 1955, was converted into a city-run nursing home, closed in 1998, and was demolished in time for Memorial Day 2023]?1

Ralph: I recently had a girl tell me that that they’re going to make that building, I call it The Big House, a hotel. Personally, I think it could make the beach look nicer. Hopefully

it could bring Riis back to where it could be: more glamorous, more fun, fix up the roads [and] the boardwalk. I don't think it will necessarily make us move the Village area. How could they do that? Well, it's public, but it's a federal beach. They have their own rules.

Gili: That's an interesting perspective.

Some organizers I know believe it could displace the Village area.2

Ralph: I don't think so.

Gili: What made the shows feel so

different than what you would see in an average fashion show?

Ralph: Many people didn't realize where I come from, my background in design and fashion.

I knew exactly how I wanted the tents, what

direction I wanted the speakers to angle so the sound goes over the water (and not down the beach to bother anybody), and where to put the tables for the food, how the poles are lined up so everybody can sit along the runway. My designers made outfits you had never seen before. Like something Grace Jones would come out wearing.

Gili: How about the nature at Riis—the

ocean, the sun, the dunes, the waves of the Atlantic, the rose bushes, and even the dolphins swimming?

Ralph: Having this kind of fashion show on the beach made it a little more exotic. The audience felt relaxed in the hot sun; being basically half naked, with no clothes on watching the show. Seeing the people come with beautiful colors—in all red against the white sand, or all blue. The outfits everybody would come in. All because I would say the color of that year. I said let's have a neon party. Could you imagine the neon colors that came on that beach? Over 200 people in neon colors, and overhead neon fabric comes from ten foot poles. That was the most pretty, out of all the parties.

Occasionally we saw dolphins out there,

which is very surprising. I think the first time I started seeing dolphins out there was the early 1970s. We saw them jumping, we couldn't believe it in this water. Everything was just so beautiful at the time. Even now, it

still has this magic to it.

Gili: Did you know that jumping

is sometimes a way that dolphins communicate with a mate or another pod?

Ralph: Jumping has this magic to it, it's beautiful!

Gili: They're pushing off the water and

meeting the air on all sides! It's so open and light, and also so present. Right here, and also free completely.

Will you share about how you have

involved your communities in your fashion shows?

Ralph: I would snatch people out of the crowd. If the design needed another model, I would go out of the tent and say, "I need a girl size 10 or whatever size" and I would just grab any person in the crowd that'd like to come in. Because the fashion show was for anybody who wanted to be in it. I'd tell my friends, who want to be models, "Go in the tent, put on the clothes and walk the runway!" So it involved people in the crowd also to make them more part of it. And then, they had more fun.

Gili: In 2016, Janelle Okwodu's "2016

Was the Year Real People Took Over the Runways" for Vogue cited luminaries like Hood By Air, Eckhaus Latta, and Chromat as pioneering the tactic of placing real

people on runways. Were there other parties like that going on at Riis, besides yours?

Ralph: After a while that I was having mine, another group of Black guys, who called themselves 'The Black Pride,' started to have a dance party out there. Their party was three weeks before mine. There were four or five of them, and they put a little money together. They had big tents, a dance floor, and a performance later.

They had more connections than I did. But the main thing was that after their party was finished, they would leave garbage and trash—dirty—all over the beach. A real mess. The beach people hired a cleanup crew to clean up their mess, and they tried to present the bill to them. I heard that the Black Pride guys said, "We're not going to pay that." So the beach people said, "Oh you're not going to pay for it! Okay no more parties for nobody on the beach anymore." So that one messed me up. That's why my parties stopped. And I had nothing to do with them. I didn't even know them. So that's why I haven't had more parties.

Gili: Would you like to throw another party?

Ralph: Now I probably could get a permit. Even now a lot of people still don't know where Riis Beach is. In Manhattan, they ask, "What beach do you go to?" I say, "Riis." They say "So where is that?" I'm not surprised that people still don't know. It is kind of nice, because it kind of makes it a more private beach for us. I've been a beach person all my life. Riis Beach, from day one, I loved it right away... I used to go every weekend by train or by bus. It was just you felt more at ease at Riis. It fits my personality, I would say. It's more fun.

Part II: Gili calls Ralph over the phone. Four months since the two, along with Halo Kaya Perez-Gallardo, co-organized 'Ralph's Neon Oasis Beach Party' on the same site at Riis Beach, Queens, New York. January 16, 2023.

Ralph: I wish I had remembered for us to all walk the runway together—you, me and Halo.

Gili: I didn't expect to walk the runway. I'm glad to have just gotten the chance to be there and see you walk. What did it feel like for you?

Ralph: When I'm on stage, I see you but I don't see you. I look at the crowd, my mind is on the music and my body is on what I've got to do next. I'm in my own little bubble.

Gili: What were your favorite parts of the party?

Ralph: I loved seeing you dancing with Joyce. I was so happy that you were having such a good time.

Gili: It was the experience of a lifetime.

Ralph: You were part of it. It really is a part of history at Riis Beach.

Gili: Why do you think that's important to throw these beach parties?

Ralph: This has never been done—a fashion show on Riis Beach. Something for not just the gays but for all the people. It gives them something to do, something to be a part of. It's fun for everybody. When we look back years from now, they'll say, "remember that party and the beach, the fashions and the fun people." Somebody has to finally come up, years ago and even now, to bring fun to the beach and to the people. Even the straight people, give them something to see! Something they hadn't

seen before, especially at the beach. That person is me. I didn't plan it that way, maybe I was chosen. And everything seemed to turn out for the good.

Gili: How was it to co-organize with Halo and me?

Ralph: You were also chosen inadvertently, to fall into it also. You have a sense of style, you know about your colors and decorations. Everyone can't do what we do. That kind of talent. It's funny how things come about. You connected to me, and then you knew Halo, and things just fell into place. We did it. I'm still pinching myself. I really had another party, at my age. I had given up on the beach. I even sold a lot of things, my tents.

Gili: How did it feel to be on the beach that day in September? I know it happened a few weeks later than August, when you usually held the parties.

Ralph: I loved not feeling enclosed, since it's outside.

Gili: How does Riis Beach feel different than the 1990s?

Ralph: Years ago, it was more gays. More gays with talent! People that we didn't know came, from across the beach, just to see what we were doing, and loved what they were seeing. I saw a lot of cameras. Smiling, clapping, having a good time. And it's safe. There's no drama.

Gili: What do you think about the building coming down?

Ralph: The property belongs to Neponsit. The building has nothing to do with Riis. Riis Beach is federal property. They can't make anyone on the gay side move. They have no say on that. The only thing is that it'll be open, and they're just going to build whatever they're going to build.

Maybe it'll be nice! Finally get a breeze coming through it! (laughs) Always so hot over there.

Gili: Ralph, when I see you, I feel like I belong.

Ralph: Are you wearing black slacks? I had a flash of you wearing black slacks.

Notes: 1. Atul Dev, "LGBTQ beach sanctum faces demolition in New York," Reuters, October 12, 2022.

2. James Hannaham with Melissa Guerrero, Jeffrey Furticella, Tanner Curtis, Rebecca Lieberman, and Yael Malka, "Will Demolition Ruin 'The People's Beach'?" *The New York Times*, September 15, 2022.

This book is dedicated to the community at Riis Beach who brought these events to life, and all the people who gather on the beach for the sun, water, and community. Thank you everyone for making my parties beautiful. ❤ Ralph Hopkins

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Front cover, Contents: Ralph's Red Hot Beach Party, 1997
Back cover, Ralph's Thank You Note: Ralph's Blue Ice Beach Party, 1998

WE DO THIS 'TIL WE FREE US

MARIAME KABA

ABOLITIONIST ORGANIZING AND TRANSFORMING JUSTICE

Hope Is a Discipline

Interview by Kim Wilson and Brian Sonenstein

Beyond Prisons, January 2018

Kim Wilson: *I think someone retweeted something you posted the other day, and it just really resonated with me and has helped me tremendously.... It is something you wrote about hope being a discipline. I got to tell you, it made my day, if not my week, absolutely! Because it is easy to get down on everything that's going on.*

Mariame Kaba: Sure.

Wilson: *It's really easy to kind of look around and be like, "Oh my God, everything, set it all on fire and let's just be done!"* [laughs] *Especially right now, and I think that plugging in with folks and reading things and listening to things that are affirming and uplifting and do allow you to focus on the hopeful side of things are part of abolition. I'd like you to say something about that, but I have another part to that question, which is about self-care for those of us doing this work. That's something I spend a lot of time thinking about and talking about.*

Kaba: I always tell people, for me, hope doesn't preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes total sense. Hope isn't an emotion, you know? Hope is not optimism.

I think that for me, understanding that is really helpful in my practice around organizing. I believe that there's always a potential for transformation and for change. And that is in any direction, good or bad. The idea of hope being a discipline is something I heard from a nun many years ago who was talking about it in conjunction with making sure we were of the world and in the world. Living in the afterlife already in the present was kind of a form of escape, but it was really, really important for us to live in the world and be of the world. The hope that she was talking about was this grounded hope that was practiced every day, that people actually practiced all the time.

I bowed down to that. I heard that many years ago, and then I felt the sense of, "Oh my God. That speaks to me as a philosophy of living, that hope is a discipline and that we have to practice it every single day." Because in the world we live in, it's easy to feel a sense of hopelessness, that everything is all bad all the time, that nothing is going to change ever, that people are evil and bad at the bottom. It feels sometimes that it's being proven in various different ways, so I really get that. I understand why people feel that way. I just choose differently. I choose to think a different way, and I choose to act in a different way. I choose to trust people until they prove themselves untrustworthy.

Jim Wallace, who people know as a liberal Evangelical, who thinks about faith a lot and talks about faith a lot, he always talks about the fact that hope is really believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change. And that, to me, makes total sense. I believe ultimately that we're going to win, because I believe there are more people who want justice, real justice, than there are those who are working against that.

And I don't take a short-term view. I take a long view, understanding full well that I'm just a tiny, little part of a story that already has a huge antecedent and has something that is going to come after that. I'm definitely not going to be even close to around for seeing the end of it. That also puts me in the right frame of mind: that my little friggin' thing I'm doing is actually pretty insignificant in world history, but if it's significant to one or two people, I feel good about that. If I'm making my stand in the world and that benefits my particular community of people, the people I designate as my community, and I see them benefiting by my labor, I feel good about that. That actually is enough for me.

Maybe I just have a different perspective. I talk to a lot of young organizers—people reach out to me a lot because I've been organizing for a long time—I'm always telling them—"Your timeline is not the timeline on which movements occur. Your timeline is incidental. Your timeline is only for yourself to mark your growth and your living." But that's a fraction of the living that's going to be done by the universe and that has already been done by the universe. When you understand that you're really insignificant in the grand scheme of things, then it's a freedom, in my opinion, to actually be able to do the work that's necessary as you see it and to contribute in the ways that you see fit.

And self-care is really tricky for me because I don't believe in the self in the way that people determine it here in this capitalist society that we live in. I don't believe in self-care: I believe in collective care, collectivizing our care, and thinking more about how we can help each other. How can we collectivize the care of children so that more people can feel like they can actually have their kids but also live in the world and contribute and participate in various different ways? How do we do that?

How do we collectivize care so that when we're sick and we're not feeling ourselves, we've got a crew of people who are not just our prayer warriors but our action warriors who are thinking through with us? Like, I'm just not going to be able to cook this week, and you have a whole bunch of folks there who are just putting a list together for you and bringing food every day that week, and you're doing the same for your community too.

I want that as the focus of how I do things, and that really comes from the fact that I grew up the daughter of returned migrants, African returned migrants. I don't see the world the way that people do here. I don't agree with it; I think capitalism is actually continuously alienating us from each other, but also even from ourselves, and I just don't subscribe. For me, it's too much, "Yeah, I'm going to go do yoga, and then I'm going to go and do some sit-ups and maybe I'll go … " You don't have to go anywhere to care for yourself. You can just care for yourself and your community in tandem, and that can actually be much more healthy for you, by the way. Because all this internalized reflection is not good for people. Yes, think about yourself, reflect on your practice, okay. But then you need to test it in the world; you've got to be with people. That's important. And I hate people! So I say that as somebody who actually is really antisocial.

[Wilson and Sonenstein laugh]

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[Wilson and Sonenstein laugh]

Kaba: And I say, "I hate people." I don't want to socialize in that kind of way, but I do want to be social with other folks as it relates to collectivizing care.

The Practices We Need: #MeToo and Transformative Justice

Interview by Autumn Brown and adrienne maree brown

How to Survive the End of the World, November 2018

adrienne maree brown: *The #MeToo movement has swollen and become this massive place where a lot of people are calling for transformative justice and community accountability processes, and I'm wondering how you see it.*

Mariame Kaba: Yeah, I have been thinking a lot about #MeToo and thinking, What if we look at it as something that is not done to "bad people?" What if it is actually a way to understand the ways that various forms of violence actually shape our lives? If we could see it as a way to understand how deeply enmeshed we are in the very systems that we're organizing to transform, then I feel like it's a movement that will allow us to move a step toward transformation and more justice. The real truth of the matter is that when you think about #MeToo and you think about sexual violence, these things don't live outside of us. They really don't. They are systems that live within us, that manifest outside of us. If we don't really take that seriously, I don't think we're going to make a dent in this problem.

The fact that sexual violence is so incredibly pervasive should tell us that it's not a story of individual monsters. We have got to think about this in a more complex way if we're really going to uproot forms of sexual violence.

Autumn Brown: *If you could, say more about what you mean by "these systems live inside us as well as outside of us."*

Kaba: This is something I take from Morgan Bassichis, who was part of Oakland-based Community United Against Violence. Morgan had written that basically the very systems that we're working to dismantle live inside us. And that really struck me when I first read it. It forced me to acknowledge my own complicity in forms of violence that I may not even personally be perpetrating in an intentional way. It also calmed me down to some extent. When you're always in a position of seeing everything as outside of you, then you're always on the outside looking in, which isn't necessarily the best way to address forms of violence. We have to do both. We have to be on the outside looking in but also on the inside looking out.

Brown: *When and where in your trajectory in this work did you really decide to start focusing on working with those who have caused harm. And how did that happen for you?*

Kaba: I've always worked more with people who have been harmed than have caused harm. My work was rooted in supporting survivors, mainly because I myself am one. And my orien-

tation has always been toward addressing harm, wherever it is. However I can intervene in a way that's supportive, that's really what I care about. It didn't really matter whether it was the person who caused harm or the person who has experienced harm—it's the harm that I'm interested in transforming.

Over the years more people started approaching me. Initially I got called into this work by happenstance. A friend of mine was sexually assaulted in the early 2000s by somebody else that we knew in common. And I was called in to help and to support her through that process. I didn't ask to do this. And still, I'm not paid to do this kind of work. I facilitate only within my communities. So it became something where it was like, "Oh, I'm going to try to step in and support these folks who I know. And I don't want the harm to compound. And clearly people are in pain. And what can I help do to support that?"

I'm not trained as a social worker or a psychologist or anything like that. It was really like, "This is happening in my community, people are in pain, there's harm, what can we do." About fifteen years ago people started asking me to come and support them. Come and help. People who caused harm reached out and said, "This has occurred, and I'm trying to figure out what to do." That's how that happened. And then in the last few years a couple of processes that I facilitated got known by other people. And through that more people who have caused harm approached me. Or people who knew people who had caused harm would approach me to support them in taking accountability for their actions.

Note that I said support them in taking accountability for their actions. I'm not able to actually force anybody into taking accountability. It has to be a voluntary process through which somebody decides to do that. You can never actually make anybody accountable. People have to be accountable. I want to be very explicit about that. A lot of the frustration that I hear from people who think about transformative justice or community accountability is really people who want to punish people. I totally understand that they want punishment. It's a normal human reaction within a society that is so incredibly punitive. How do you live outside that?

Remember again, the systems live within us. The punishment mindset is very hard to get out of. And it's normal and healthy often to want vengeance against people for causing you great harm. That's not going to get addressed in an accountability process. If you are the one who is rushing after that and that's really what you're seeking, an accountability process really would not help. You're always going to be feeling as though it's "not working" because it's not doing the thing that you really would like.

And I really want to make people understand that. Not everything should be in an accountability process. Not everything can be resolved in an accountability process. Accountability processes often feel terrible to the people while they're in it. It's not a healing process. It might put you on the road toward your own personal healing.

Brown: *This is exactly where we're heading. This is exactly what we want to get into. The experience I have as someone who is trying to mediate things is that people go through it, they go through one time, the process doesn't work the way they want it to. They don't feel like we deeply returned to a place of love that we had never reached in the first place: we're totally healed, it's all clear. We don't get that. And then people are like, "Well, transformative justice doesn't work. Fuck this process, I'm*

not going to do it."... what are some of the other things that make it fail, and then, conversely, what are some of the things that make it succeed?

Kaba: While the person has to be willing to at least begin a process of taking accountability for their actions, they don't need to necessarily be at the point where they've admitted harm. I think this is very important. Because what is the process for? It's to get people to understand how they've harmed people. It's to get them to sit with this harm that happened to this person and to be like, "Oh my god, I thought I was doing this right thing, and here's this situation, and this is the person's experience." So I think often people think before we can even start a process people have to put out a statement. Well, no, the statement process writing thing might be part of the accountability process, but it's not necessarily necessary for the beginning of it, in order to initiate it. So that's very important for people to understand off the bat.

I want to say something also briefly about the concept of success and failure. In trainings that I do with my good friend Shira Hassan we read a very short piece that was written by Bench Ansfield and Jenna Peters-Golden about getting seduced by the idea of success and failure within processes, published in in *Makeshift*, a feminist magazine. And it's really helpful. Failure and mistakes are part of a process. That feels counterintuitive because when people are in pain and have been harmed, you think you have to be perfect in order to protect that person from further harm. And what I always tell people is that as a survivor and as somebody who has been around survivors my entire life in my community, we are actually not fragile beings. We are incredibly, incredibly pragmatic. And very resilient. Because we've survived a lot of bullshit.

And so going into processes, if you go into it with an idea that the person you're working with is a fragile China doll who is going to crack under any pressure, you can't make a mistake—well, then you're already set up for failure, in the sense of potential catastrophic hurt. Start off with the notion that our process allows for survivors to reclaim agency. That's what you're working toward. The binary of success/failure, get rid of that. That's important, number one.

Number two, you have to know the goals of the process. A third thing is knowing whether or not you're the right person to actually get into this. Do you have the support system that will help you navigate this? Are you facilitating this by yourself? Do you have a team of people? How are you going to end this process? Because it should not be something that goes on for ninety years. There should be an end to it. How will you know it is over? Having goals will help you in that. So those are all very critical important things to have at the outset or to be working out through the process. I think the failure parts or the places that will ensure ineffectiveness are not knowing whether or not you're the right person to hold this.

It's not having any goals. It's the other side of the thing I just said are the ingredients that you need for a strong process. It's really not being clear with people about what the wants and needs are. What do people really want? And you can't get—people cannot get all their wants met in a process.

Brown: *Just as a follow-up to that, are there processes that you're like, "I feel like I have to walk away from this"? And are there processes that you've heard that you're like, "Oh, I know what to offer." Do you only respond if people are like, "Come help," or are there things where you're like, "Hey, I see y'all over there?"*

Kaba: I never seek out any processes. Ever. It's not a job for me. It's not a way of sustenance. It's a political commitment that I make because I'm in community with people who aren't going to avail themselves of the systems that currently exist for multiple reasons. And it also fits within my larger political commitment to PIC abolition. That is why I'm engaged. I never seek out any processes; people come to me. Frankly much more than I can even offer any support around. But I'm very good about boundaries. I'm very good about confining myself to what I really think I can offer. I'm one person. There's no way I can have integrity and give what needs to be done to everything if I'm just all over the place. I really focus on that. And I always tell people where I stand. And sometimes I can try to help people figure out whether a process is possible, so I might do that. So those are the kinds of things I would do.

Brown: *And what I hear in what you're describing is the difference between intervention versus support. Right. That in our movement spaces we do need those kinds of interventions of, "Hey, y'all, take this offline." This is not the way that we're going to get healing or accountability. But I'm hearing the difference between those kinds of interventions versus what level of commitment is required in order to be a part of a sustained process.... I personally really struggle with this question of what is the relationship between healing and accountability? Especially coming out of a healing justice framework in terms of my movement background.*

Kaba: Yes, this is a great question. I'm going to backtrack one second to the question of intervention versus support. I also think we need to make distinctions between conflict resolution and accountability processes. I think that's right. And I think I'm not an expert in conflict resolution, actually. I've never taken a class. I don't know how to—that's not the work I do. I help some people facilitate processes of accountability, which is different. And so I think sometimes we're all over the place in our language. But that also leads to people thinking they're doing everything, and then they're doing nothing. I think that's important to keep in mind.

So, jumping to the question that you actually asked about healing, I think it's such an important question. I've come to my understanding of this through being part of processes. Initially I thought that these processes were intended for healing. But it turned out that I wasn't actually asking the people involved what their needs and wants were. And for many people it was not actually healing. They were not trying—their needs were not to heal within this particular space. Their needs were to have an acknowledgement of the harm that occurred, to insist that this person never do this again, to address issues around trust and figuring out how to trust people again. It was self-agency and self-accountability. There was a list of things. And healing almost never came up. So that sounds a bit counterintuitive. But I realized later on why that was. And it was because people were actually understanding that to heal, they needed a different kind of space to be in.

They were initially coming to me at a point where it was high amounts of pain, suffering, lots of emotions happening. So much stuff happening that healing wasn't even in their head at the moment. It was like, "I'm just trying to maintain." This is going to help me get to the point where I can feel like I can be in my apartment by myself again. I need people around me to do that, so how am I going to get my friends on board with coming and visiting me every week? Things like that were what was needed to get on the path toward their own very long journey toward a healing space. But it wasn't a destination within the process itself. And

that helped me figure out later on when people would say, "I didn't get healing," I was like, "Oh, okay." I was hearing other people say, "The process was really traumatic for me. It brought up all this stuff for me. It was painful for me. It was whatever." And people were like, "Oh, that meant that it was ineffective and that it was failing." And I was like actually in hearing how people were talking about that, I was like, "Actually this process sounds like it was doing exactly what was needed to get this person, a year down the road, toward their own healing." Figuring out what that would look like. I'm not saying that you won't necessarily get what you need to heal in a process. I'm just saying that for many, many times, processes feel terrible. Because the harm is so central. And if you're engaged in the process with the person who harmed you—my god. It's bringing up so much stuff that if you're constantly trying to grab at the healing, you're not in the harm, processing that. You're outside looking for that destination that's somewhere down the road. But no, actually we have to be right here right now, handling all that. The fear, the anger, the vengeance feelings, the back and forth sliding against one day you want them dead, the next day you're okay. We just have to be here holding this right now. So that's what I mean by it's not—often feels like it's not—a healing space. Because healed is not a destination. You're just always in process. So that's what I'm talking about. Doesn't mean that what you experience can't help toward that healing. Of course, it does in its best way, in its best iteration. But while you're in it, it often does not feel that way at all.

Brown: *I'm just wondering if you can talk about how doing this work has been transformational for you and how it's—if and how—it's changed your relationship to your own history.*

Kaba: Yes. Oh my gosh. Thank you for that question. Because I really wouldn't be doing this only as a political project if it wasn't also transforming me in the process of doing this work with other people. My friend Danielle Sered has said and written this thing that really made a difference for me. She's lovely and runs this organization here in New York called Common Justice, which people should look up for multiple reasons. But she wrote a thing that stuck with me, which was that "no one enters violence for the first time by committing it." No one enters violence for the first time by committing it. And it just—I was like—Jesus Christ. If that's true, then all this shit that we talk about, these binaries about victims and perpetrators—that explodes it all.

At heart it's the harm that exists that has motivated and transformed us and allowed us to continue, and if we're not intervened with, will keep harming people in bigger and bigger ways. When we know we're all going to harm each other, it's a matter of degrees.

So being in this work with people has helped to make what Sered said come to life for me in a way that just undergirds my values and my beliefs. In real, real ways. The second thing that I've learned about myself is how much I realize that punishment does not work. It does not work. If it actually did what people wanted, we'd be in a whole different place.

Not only is it true that punishment doesn't work, but also when you prioritize punishment it means that patriarchy remains firmly in place. And if I am at my core interested in dismantling systems of oppression, I have got to get rid of punishment. I have got to do it. But I want accountability. I want people to take responsibility. I want that internal resource that allows you to take responsibility for harms that you commit against yourself and other people. I want that to be a central part of how we interact with each other. Because while I don't

believe in punishment, I believe in consequences for actions that are done to harm other people. I do. I think boundaries are important. I think all these things are really important. But with punishment at the center of everything we haven't been able to really address the other stuff that needs to happen. Because people fucking need to—they need to take accountability when they harm people.

brown: *Can I just ask a quick follow-up to that? Can you just give for our listeners and for us an example of a punishment versus a consequence?*

Kaba: Yes. Sure. Punishment means inflicting cruelty and suffering on people. When you are expecting consequences, those can be unpleasant and uncomfortable. But they are not suffering and inflicting pain on people and you want them to suffer as a result. That is different. And what I mean by that is, for example, powerful people stepping down from their jobs are consequences, not punishments. Why? Because we should have boundaries. And because shit that you did was wrong, and you having power is a privilege. That means we can take that away from you. You don't have power anymore. But if we were punishing you, we would make it so that you could never make a living again in any context, at any point. That's inflicting cruelty, suffering, and making it so that people cannot actually live a life. They can't access the basic things to make life livable.

If you are doing that to somebody, you're punishing them. If you are asking somebody to move to another place because they caused harm to the people living there: consequence. If you're making it so that person can never have housing: punishment. Okay, so you have to just be able to see the difference between inflicting cruelty, pain, and suffering and being uncomfortable and losing some privileges—these are not the same things.

SUDDENLY,
A KNOCK ON THE DOOR

ETGAR KERET

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW BY MIRIAM SHLESINGER,
SONDRA SILVERSTON, AND NATHAN ENGLANDER

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX NEW YORK

SUDDENLY, A KNOCK ON THE DOOR

'Tell me a story," the bearded man sitting on my living-room sofa commands. The situation, I must say, is anything but pleasant. I'm someone who *writes* stories, not someone who tells them. And even *that* isn't something I do on demand. The last time anyone asked me to tell him a story, it was my son. That was a year ago. I told him something about a fairy and a ferret—I don't even remember what exactly—and within two minutes he was fast asleep. But the situation is fundamentally different. Because my son doesn't have a beard, or a pistol. Because my son asked for the story nicely, and this man is simply trying to rob me of it.

I try to explain to the bearded man that if he puts his pistol away it will only work in his favor, in our favor. It's hard to think up a story with the barrel of a loaded pistol pointed at your head. But the guy insists. "In this country," he explains, "if you want something, you have to use force." He just got here from Sweden, and in Sweden it's completely different. Over there, if you want something, you ask politely, and most of the time you get it. But not in the stifling, muggy Middle East. All it takes is one week in this place to figure out how things work—or rather, how things don't work. The Palestinians asked for a state, nicely. Did they get one? The hell they did. So they switched to blowing up kids on buses, and people started listening. The settlers wanted a dialogue. Did anyone pick up on it? No way. So they started getting physical, pouring hot oil on the border patrolmen, and suddenly they had an audience. In this country, might makes right, and it doesn't matter if it's about politics, or economics or a parking space. Brute force is the only language we understand.

Sweden, the place the bearded guy made aliya from, is progressive, and is way up there in quite a few areas. Sweden isn't just ABBA or IKEA or the Nobel Prize. Sweden is a world unto itself, and whatever they have, they got by peaceful means. In Sweden, if he'd gone to the Ace of Base soloist, knocked on her door, and asked her to sing for him, she'd have invited him in and made him a cup of tea. Then she'd have pulled out her acoustic guitar from under the bed and played for him. All this with a smile! But here? I mean, if he hadn't been flashing a pistol I'd have thrown him out right away. Look, I try to reason. "'Look' yourself," the bearded guy grumbles, and cocks his pistol. "It's either a story or a bullet between the eyes." I see my choices are limited. The guy means business. "Two people are sitting in a room," I begin. "Suddenly, there's a knock on the door." The bearded guy stiffens, and for a moment I think maybe the story's getting to him, but it isn't. He's listening to something else. There's a knock on the door. "Open it," he tells me, "and don't try anything. Get rid of whoever it is, and do it fast, or this is going to end badly."

The young man at the door is doing a survey. He has a few questions. Short ones. About the high humidity here in summer, and how it affects my disposition. I tell him I'm not interested but he pushes his way inside anyway.

"Who's that?" he asks me, pointing at the bearded guy. "That's my nephew from Sweden," I lie. "His father died in an avalanche and he's here for the funeral. We're just going over the will. Could you please respect our privacy and leave?" "C'mon, man," the pollster says, and pats me on the shoulder. "It's just a few questions. Give a guy a chance to earn a few bucks. They pay me per respondent." He flops down on the sofa, clutching his binder. The Swede takes a seat next to him. I'm still standing, trying to sound like I mean it. "I'm asking you to leave," I tell him. "Your timing is way off." "Way off, eh?" He opens the plastic binder and pulls out a big revolver. "Why's my timing off? 'Cause I'm darker? 'Cause I'm not good enough? When it comes to Swedes, you've got all the time in the world. But for a Moroccan, for a war veteran who left pieces of his spleen behind in Lebanon,

you can't spare a fucking minute." I try to reason with him, to tell him it's not that way at all, that he'd simply caught me at a delicate point in my conversation with the Swede. But the pollster raises his revolver to his lips and signals me to shut up. *"Vamos,"* he says. "Stop making excuses. Sit down over there, and out with it." "Out with what?" I ask. The truth is, now I'm pretty uptight. The Swede has a pistol too. Things might get out of hand. East is east and west is west, and all that. Different mentalities. Or else the Swede could lose it, simply because he wants the story all to himself. Solo. "Don't get me started," the pollster warns. "I have a short fuse. Out with the story—and make it quick." "Yeah," the Swede chimes in, and pulls out his piece too. I clear my throat, and start all over again. "Three people are sitting in a room." "And no 'Suddenly, there's a knock on the door,'" the Swede announces. The pollster doesn't quite get it, but plays along with him. "Get going," he says. "And no knocking on the door. Tell us something else. Surprise us."

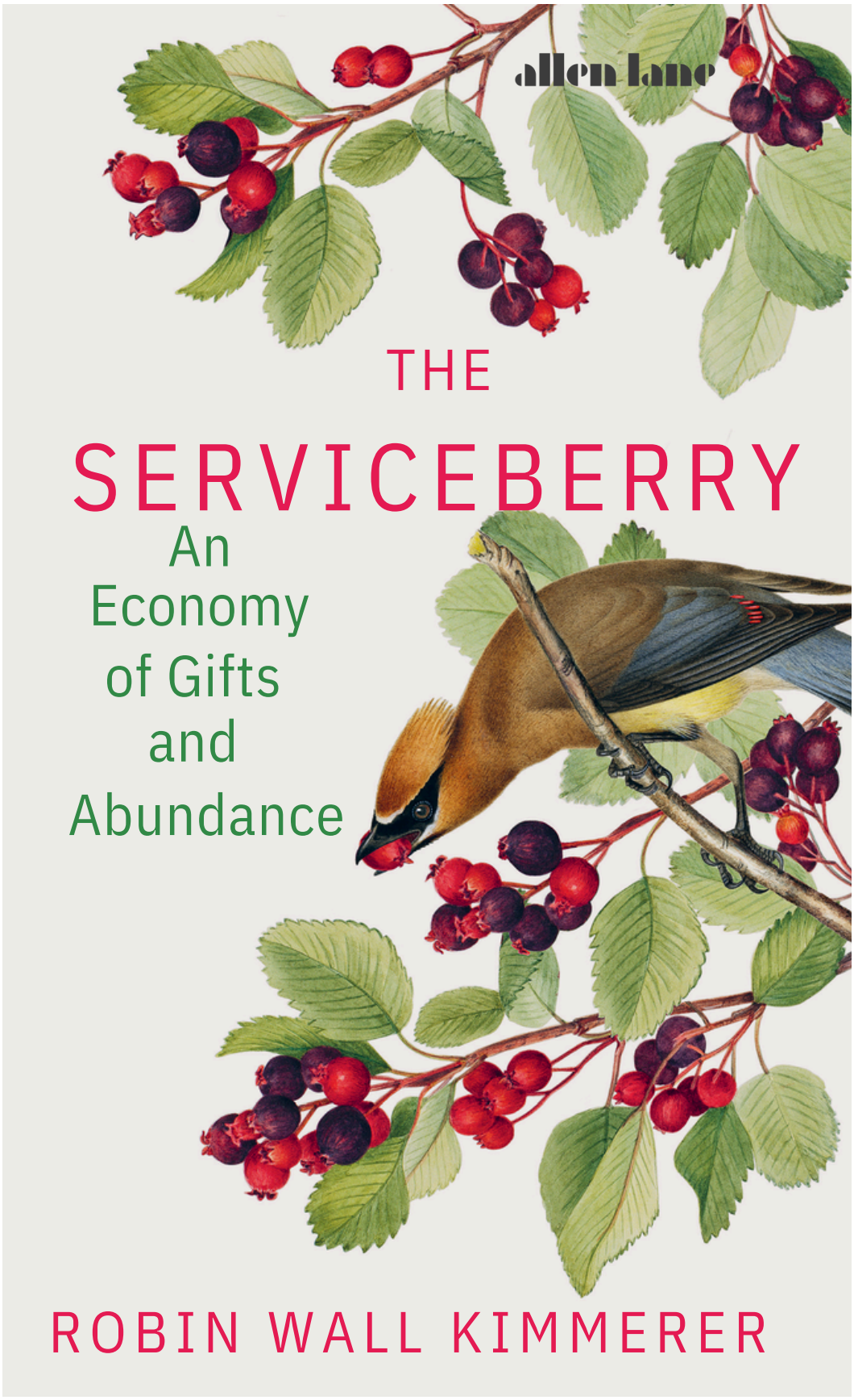
I stop short, and take a deep breath. Both of them are staring at me. How do I always get myself into these situations? I bet things like this never happen to Amos Oz or David Grossman. Suddenly there's a knock on the door. Their gaze turns menacing. I shrug. It's not about me. There's nothing in my story to connect it to that knock. "Get rid of him," the pollster orders me. "Get rid of him, whoever it is." I open the door just a crack. It's a pizza delivery guy. "Are you Keret?" he asks. "Yes," I say, "but I didn't order a pizza." "It says here Fourteen Zamenhoff Street," he snaps, pointing at the printed delivery slip and pushing his way inside. "So what," I say, "I didn't order a pizza." "Family size," he insists. "Half pineapple, half anchovy. Prepaid. Credit card. Just gimme my tip and I'm outta here." "Are you here for a story too?" the Swede interrogates. "What story?" the pizza guy asks, but it's obvious he's lying. He's not very good at it. "Pull it out," the pollster prods. "C'mon, out with the pistol already." "I don't have a pistol," the pizza guy admits awkwardly, and draws a cleaver out from under his cardboard tray. "But I'll cut him into julienne strips unless he coughs up a good one, on the double."

The three of them are on the sofa—the Swede on the right, then the pizza guy, then the pollster. "I can't do it like this," I tell them. "I can't get a story going with the three of you here and your weapons and all that. Go take a walk around the block, and by the time you get back, I'll have something for you." "The asshole's gonna call the cops," the pollster tells the Swede. "What's he thinking, that we were born yesterday?" "C'mon, give us one and we'll be on our way," the pizza guy begs. "A short one. Don't be so anal. Things are tough, you know. Unemployment, suicide bombings, Iranians. People are hungry for something else. What do you think brought law-abiding guys like us this far? We're desperate, man, desperate."

I clear my throat and start again. "Four people are sitting in a room. It's hot. They're bored. The air conditioner's on the blink. One of them asks for a story. The second one joins in, then the third …" "That's not a story," the pollster protests. "That's an eyewitness report. It's exactly what's happening here right now. Exactly what we're trying to run away from. Don't you go and dump reality on us like a garbage truck. Use your imagination, man, create, invent, take it all the way."

I nod and start again. "A man is sitting in a room, all by himself. He's lonely. He's a writer. He wants to write a story. It's been a long time since he wrote his last story, and he misses it. He misses the feeling of creating something out of something. That's right—something out of something. Because something out of nothing is when you make something up out of thin air, in which case it has no value. Anybody can do that. But something out of something means it was really there the whole time, inside you, and you discover it as part of something new, that's never happened before. The man decides to write a story about the situation. Not the political situation and not the social situation either. He decides to write a story about the human situation, the human condition. The human condition the way

he’s experiencing it right now. But he draws a blank. No story presents itself. Because the human condition the way he’s experiencing it right now doesn’t seem to be worth a story, and he’s just about to give up when suddenly …” “I warned you already,” the Swede interrupts me. “No knock on the door.” “I’ve got to,” I insist. “Without a knock on the door there’s no story.” “Let him,” the pizza guy says softly. “Give him some slack. You want a knock on the door? Okay, have your knock on the door. Just so long as it brings us a story.”


allen lane
THE
SERVICEBERRY
An Economy of Gifts and Abundance
ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

The cool breath of evening slips off the wooded hills, displacing the heat of the day,

and with it come the birds, as eager for the cool as I am. They arrive in a ock of calls that sound like laughter, and I have to laugh back with the same delight. They are all around me, Cedar Waxwings and Catbirds and a ash of Bluebird iridescence. I have never felt such a kinship to my namesake, Robin, as in this moment when we are both stuffing our mouths with berries and chortling with happiness. The bushes are laden with fat clusters of red, blue, and wine purple in every stage of ripeness—so many, you can pick them by the handful. I'm glad I have a pail, and it's getting pretty heavy. The birds carry their berries in the buckets of their

bellies and wonder if they will be able to fly with so much cargo.

This abundance of berries feels like a pure gift from the land. I have not earned, paid for, nor labored for them. There is no mathematics of worthiness that reckons I deserve them in any way. And yet here they are—along with the sun and the air and the birds and the rain, gathering in towers of cumulonimbi, a distant storm building. You could call them natural resources or ecosystem services, but the Robins and I know them as gifts. We both sing gratitude with our mouths full.

Part of my delight comes from their unexpected presence. I never imagined that I could pick them here. The local native Serviceberries, *Amelanchier arborea,* have small, hard fruits, which tend toward dryness, and only once in a while is there a tree with sweet offerings. The bounty in my bucket today is a western species—*A. alnifolia,* known as Saskatoons—planted by my farmer neighbors, Paulie and Ed. This is their first bearing year,

and they produce berries with an enthusiasm that matches my own.

Saskatoon, Juneberry, Shadbush, Shadblow, Sugarplum, Sarvis, Serviceberry—these are among the many names for *Amelanchier*. Ethnobotanists know that the more names a plant has, the greater its cultural importance. The tree is beloved for its fruits, for medicinal use, and for the early froth of flowers that whiten woodland edges at the first hint of spring. Serviceberry is known as a calendar plant, so faithful is it to seasonal weather patterns. Its bloom is a sign that the ground has thawed. In this folklore, this was the time that mountain roads became passable for circuit preachers, who arrived to conduct church services. It is also a reliable indicator to fisherfolk that the shad are running upstream—or at least it was back in the day when rivers were clear and free enough to support the spawning of shad.

Calendar plants like Serviceberry are important for synchronizing the seasonal rounds of traditional

Indigenous People, who move in an annual cycle through their homelands to where the foods are ready. Instead of changing the land to suit their convenience, they changed themselves. Eating with the seasons is a way of honoring abundance, by going to meet it when and where it arrives. A world of produce warehouses and grocery stores enables the practice of having what you want when you want it. We force the food to come to us, at considerable nancial and ecological costs, rather than following the practice of taking what has been given to us, each in its own time. These Serviceber- ries were not coerced, and their carbon footprint is nothing. Maybe that's why they taste so good—they come only this time of year—these ephemeral sips of summer, without the aftertaste of harm.

The name "Serviceberry" comes not from its "service" but from a very old version of its Rose Family name, "Sorbus," which became "sarvis" and hence "service." While the name did not derive from its benefits, the plant does provide myriad

goods and services. Not only to humans but to many other citizens. It is a preferred browse of Deer and Moose, a vital source of early pollen for newly emerging insects, and host to a suite of butterfly larvae—like Tiger Swallowtails, Viceroys, Admirals, and Hairstreaks—and berry-feasting birds who rely on those calories in breeding season.

In Potawatomi, it is called Bozakmin, which is a superlative: the best of the berries. I agree with my ancestors on the rightness of that name. Imagine a fruit that tastes like a Blueberry crossed with the satisfying heft of an Apple, a touch of rosewater and a miniscule crunch of almond-flavored seeds. They taste like nothing a grocery store has to offer: wild, complex with a chemistry that your body recognizes as the real food it's been waiting for. For me, the most important part of the word Bozakmin is "min," the root for "berry." It appears in our Potawatomi words for Blueberry, Strawberry, Raspberry, even Apple, Maize, and Wild Rice. The revelation in that word is a treasure for me, because it is also the root word for "gift."

In naming the plants who shower us with goodness, we recognize that these are gifts from our plant relatives, manifestations of their generosity, care, and creativity. When we speak of these not as things or products or commodities, but as gifts, the whole relationship changes. I can't help but gaze at them, cupped like jewels in my hand, and breathe out my gratitude.

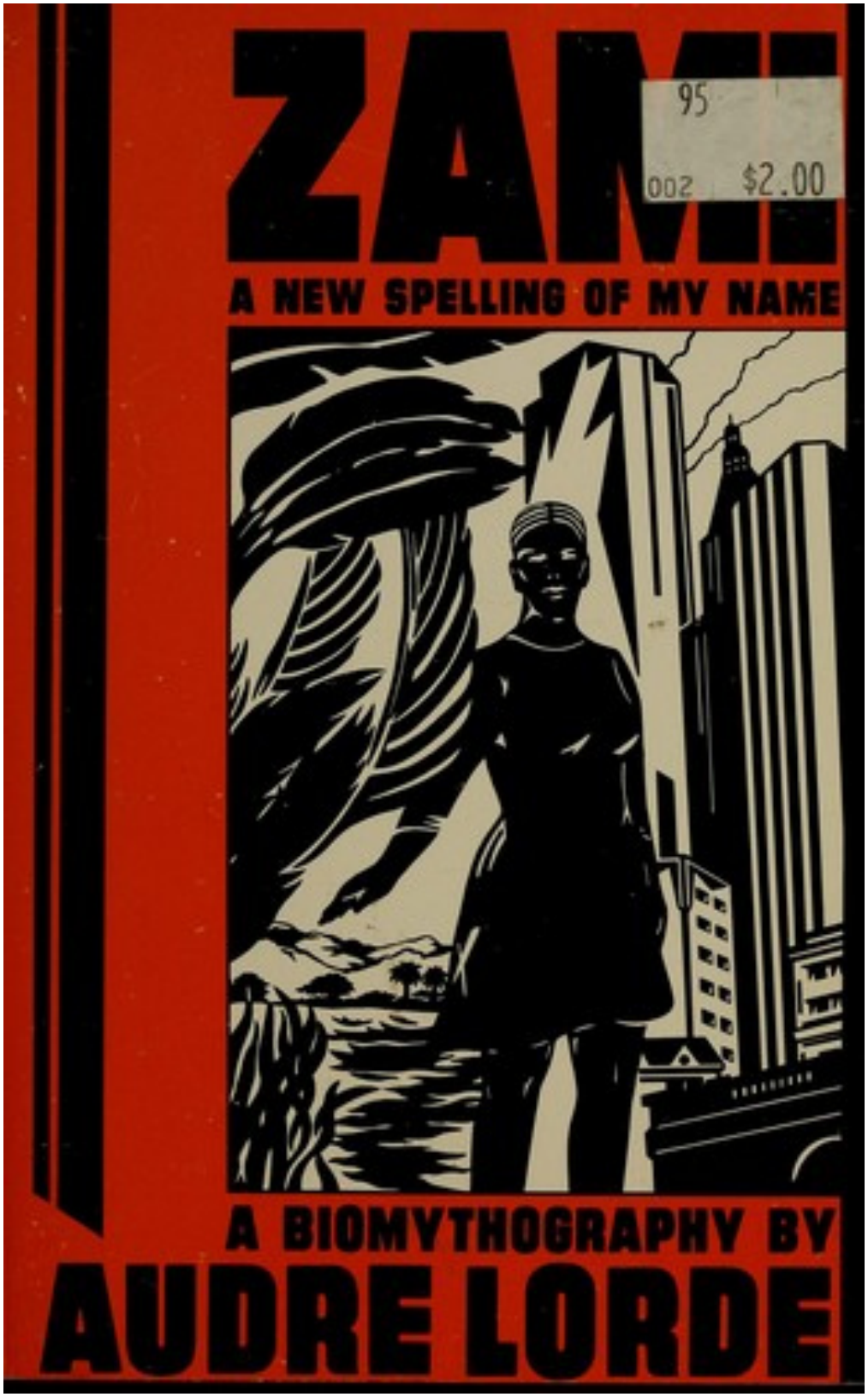
In the presence of such gifts, gratitude is the intuitive first response. The gratitude flows toward our plant elders and radiates to the rain, to the sunshine, to the improbability of bushes spangled with morsels of sweetness in a world that can be bitter.

Gratitude is so much more than a polite thank you. It is the thread that connects us in a deep relationship, simultaneously physical and spiritual, as our bodies are fed and spirits nourished by the sense of belonging, which is the most vital of foods. Gratitude creates a sense of abundance, the knowing that you have what you need. In that climate of sufficiency, our hunger for more abates and we take only what we need, in respect for the generosity of the giver.

If our first response is gratitude, then our second is reciprocity: to give a gift in return. What could I give these plants in return for their generosity? It could be a direct response, like weeding or water or a song of thanks that sends appreciation out on the wind. Or indirect, like donating to my local land trust so that more habitat for the gift givers will be saved, or making art that invites others into the web of reciprocity.

Gratitude and reciprocity are the currency of a gift economy, and they have the remarkable property of multiplying with every exchange, their energy concentrating as they pass from hand to hand, a truly renewable resource. I accept the gift from the bush and then spread that gift with a dish of berries to my neighbor, who makes a pie to share with his friend, who feels so wealthy in food and friendship that he volunteers at the food pantry. You know how it goes. To name the world as gift is to feel one's membership in the web of reciprocity. It makes you happy—and it makes you accountable. Conceiving of something as a gift changes your relationship to it in a profound way, even though the physical makeup of the "thing" has not changed.

A wooly knit hat that you purchase at the store will keep you warm regardless of its origin, but if it was hand knit by your favorite auntie, then you are in relationship to that "thing" in a very different way: you are responsible for it, and your gratitude has motive force in the world. You're likely to take much better care of the gift hat than the commodity hat, because it is knit of relationships. This is the power of gift thinking. I imagine if we acknowledged that everything we consume is the gift of Mother Earth, we would take better care of what we are given. Mistreating a gift has emotional and ethical gravity as well as ecological resonance. How we think ripples out to how we behave. If we view these berries, or that coal or forest, as an object, as property, it can be exploited as a commodity in a market economy. We know the consequences of that.


ZAMI
95
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A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME
A BIOMYTHOGRAPHY BY
AUDRE LORDE

it, and Jean said I'd get used to it, and I used to wonder why it wasn't possible to just love each other and be warm and close and let the grunting go.

In September I moved to my own place out in Brighton Beach. The Branded and I had found the room at the beginning of the summer, but it was occupied. The landlady said it could be rented all winter for twenty-five dollars a month. Since I was only making a hundred dollars plus one meal a day at the hospital, I couldn't afford any more.

My landlady's name was Gussie Faber. Her brother offered to help me move my stuff from Iris's house. When it was all moved in and Mrs. Faber had gone upstairs, her brother closed the door to my room and said I was a nice girl and I wouldn't have to pay him for moving me if I'd just be quiet and stand still for a minute.

I thought it was all pretty stupid, and he got cum all over the back of my dungarees.

It was a single large room with the use of a community bath and a kitchen down the hall. I shared both of them with a permanent tenant, an old woman whose children paid rent for her not to live with them. At night she would talk to herself aloud, crying because her children were making her live with a schwartze. I could hear her through the common wall adjoining our very common kitchen. By day, she sat at the kitchen table and drank my soda while I was away at work and school.

When college started, Peter and I broke up. I hadn't known really why it had begun, and I didn't know why it ended. One day Peter just said we should probably stop seeing each other for a while, and I agreed, thinking that must be the thing to do.

The rest of the autumn was an agony of loneliness, long subway rides, and not enough sleep. I worked forty-four hours a week at the hospital and went to school for fifteen more. I traveled three hours a day to and from Brighton Beach. That left half-day Saturday and all day Sunday to cry over Peter's silence and to wonder if my mother was missing me. I couldn't study.

Near the end of November I simply stayed in bed for three days, and when I got up I found I had lost my job at the hospital.

Being out of work brought a lot of new and starkly instructive experiences. It meant pawning my typewriter, which gave me nightmares, and selling my blood, which gave me chills.

Coming out of the bloodbank on the Bowery and Houston Street, clutching my five dollars, I had an image of myself ad-

justing the transfusion tube over a patient while I worked at Beth David. Into whose veins would my blood soon be flowing? And what would that person then become to me? What kind of relationship was established by the selling of blood, one to another?

Most of all, being out of work meant drinking hot water, free in the college cafeteria, and the grinding annihilation of employment agencies and the personnel clerks who grinned at my presumption in applying for jobs as a medical receptionist, and part-time at that. (I had ten dollars a week from a scholarship, most of which went towards my rent.)

Just before Christmas, I got a job through college, working afternoons for a doctor. That provided me with money to get my typewriter out of hock, and a little more time to be depressed. I took long walks along the winter beach. Coney Island was a mile away, and now that the concessions were closed, the boardwalk was a lovely quiet that matched my need. I could not go to the movies, even though I loved the pictures, because all around were people in couples and groups, and they underlined my solitary state until I felt my heart would break if I were any more alone.

One night I couldn't sleep, I walked down to the beach. The moon was full, and the tide was coming in. On the crest of every little wave, instead of whitecaps, was a fluorescent crown. The joining line of sea and sky was veiled; angles of green flame rode the night, line upon line, until the whole darkness was alight with brilliant scallops of phosphorescence, moving rhythmically in toward shore upon the waves.

Nothing I did could stop them, nor bring them back again.

That was the first Christmas I ever spent alone. I stayed in bed all day long. I could hear the old lady next door vomiting into her basin. I had put *nux vomica* into a bottle of my cream soda.

That night, Peter called, and I saw him again during the next week. We made arrangements to go away for the New Year's Eve weekend to a furriers union camp. I was to meet him at the Port Authority bus station after I finished work. I was excited; I had never been to the camp before.

I brought my boots and my jeans and my knapsack to work with me, together with a sleeping bag I had borrowed from Iris. I changed in Dr. Sutter's back office, and arrived at the bus sta-

tion at 7:30. Peter was due at 8:00 and our bus left at 8:45. He never showed up.

By 9:30 I realized he wasn't going to show up. The bus station was warm and I just sat there for another hour or so, too stunned and tired to move. At last, I gathered up my belongings and started to trudge across town to the BMT subway. The holiday crowd was already beginning to form, and the festivities and horn-blowing to welcome in the New Year were already beginning. I walked through Times Square in my jeans and my jackboots and my lumber jacket, carrying my knapsack and sleeping bag, and the tears rolled down my face as I made my way through the crowds and the slush. I could not quite believe this was all happening to me.

He called me a few days later with an explanation and I hung up on him immediately, in self-protection. I wanted to pretend he had never existed and that I had never been someone who could be treated so. I would never let anyone treat me like that again.

Two weeks later I discovered I was pregnant.

I tried to recall half-remembered information garnered from other people's friends who had been "in trouble." The doctor in Pennsylvania who did good clean abortions very cheaply because his daughter had died on a kitchen table after he had refused to abort her. But sometimes the police grew suspicious, so he wasn't always working. A call through the grapevine found out that he wasn't.

Trapped. Something—anything—had to be done. No one else can take care of this. What am I going to do?

The doctor who gave me the results of my positive rabbit test was a friend of Jean's aunt, who had said he might "help." This help meant offering to get me into a home for unwed mothers out of the city run by a friend of his. "Anything else," he said, piously, "is illegal."

I was terrified by the stories I had heard in school and from my friends about the butchers and the abortion mills of the *Daily News*. Cheap kitchen table abortions. Jean's friend Francie had died on the way to the hospital just last year after trying to do it with the handle of a number 1 paintbrush.

These horrors were not just stories, nor infrequent. I had seen too many of the results of botched abortions on the bloody gurneys lining the hallways outside the emergency room.

Besides, I had no real contacts.

Through winter-dim streets, I walked to the subway from the doctor's office, knowing I could not have a baby and knowing it with a certainty that galvanized me far beyond anything I knew to do.

The girl in the Labor Youth League who had introduced me to Peter had had an abortion, but it had cost three hundred dollars. The guy had paid for it. I did not have three hundred dollars, and I had no way of getting three hundred dollars, and I swore her to secrecy telling her the baby wasn't Peter's. Whatever was going to be done I had to do. And fast.

Castor oil and a dozen bromo quinine pills didn't help.

Mustard baths gave me a rash, but didn't help either.

Neither did jumping off a table in an empty classroom at Hunter, and I almost broke my glasses.

Ann was a licensed practical nurse I knew from working the evening shift at Beth David Hospital. We used to flirt in the nurses' pantry after midnight when the head nurse was sneaking a doze in some vacant private room on the floor. Ann's husband was a soldier in Korea. She was thirty-one years old—and *knew her way around*, in her own words—beautiful and friendly, small, sturdy, and deeply Black. One night, while we were warming the alcohol and talcum for p.m. care backrubs, she pulled out her right breast to show me the dark mole which grew at the very line where her deep-purple aureola met the lighter chocolate brown of her skin, and which, she told me with a mellow laugh, "drove all the doctors crazy."

Ann had introduced me to amphetamine samples on those long sleepy night shifts, and we crashed afterward at her bright kitchenette apartment on Cathedral Parkway, drinking black coffee and gossiping until dawn about the strange habits of head nurses, among other things.

I called Ann at the hospital and met her after work one night. I told her I was pregnant.

"I thought you was gay!"

I heard the disappointed half-question in Ann's voice, and remembered suddenly our little scene in the nurses' pantry. But my experience with people who tried to label me was that they usually did it to either dismiss me or use me. I hadn't even acknowledged my own sexuality yet, much less made any choices about it. I let the remark lay where Jesus flang it.

I asked Ann to get me some ergotrate from the pharmacy, a drug which I had heard from nurses' talk could be used to encourage bleeding.

"Are you crazy?" she said in horror. "You can't mess around with that stuff, girl; it could kill you. It causes hemorrhaging. Let me see what I can find out for you."

Everybody knows somebody, Ann said. For her, it was the mother of another nurse in surgery. Very safe and clean, foolproof and cheap, she said. An induced miscarriage by Foley catheter. A homemade abortion. The narrow hard-rubber tube, used in post-operative cases to keep various body canals open, softened when sterilized. When passed through the cervix into the uterus while soft, it coiled, all fifteen inches, neatly into the womb. Once hardened, its angular turns ruptured the bloody lining and began the uterine contractions that eventually expelled the implanted fetus, along with the membrane. If it wasn't expelled too soon. If it did not also puncture the uterus.

The process took about fifteen hours and cost forty dollars, which was a week and a half's pay.

I walked over to Mrs. Muñoz' apartment after I had finished work at Dr. Sutter's office that afternoon. The January thaw was past, and even though it was only 1:00 P.M., the sun had no warmth. The winter grey of mid-February and the darker patches of dirty Upper-East-Side snow. Against my peacoat in the wind I carried a bag containing the fresh pair of rubber gloves and the new bright-red catheter Ann had taken from the hospital for me, and a sanitary pad. I had most of the contents of my last pay envelope, plus the five dollars Ann had lent me.

"Darling, take off your skirt and panties now while I boil this." Mrs. Muñoz took the catheter from the bag and poured boiling water from a kettle over it and into a shallow basin. I sat curled around myself on the edge of her broad bed, embarrassed by my half-nakedness before this stranger. She pulled on the thin rubber gloves, and setting the basin upon the table, looked over to where I was perched in the corner of the neat, shabby room.

"Lie down, lie down. You scared, huh?" She eyed me from under the clean white kerchief that completely covered her small head. I could not see her hair, and could not tell from her sharp featured, bright-eyed face how old she was, but she looked so young it surprised me that she could have a daughter old enough to be a nurse.

"You scared? Don't be scared, sweetheart," she said, picking up the basin with the edge of a towel and moving it onto the other edge of the bed.

"Now just lie back and put your legs up. Nothing to be scared of. Nothing to it—I would do it on my own daughter. Now if you was three, four months, say, it would be harder because it

would take longer, see? But you not far gone. Don't worry. Tonight, tomorrow, maybe, you hurt a little bit, like bad cramps. You get cramps?"

I nodded, mute, my teeth clenched against the pain. But her hands were busy between my legs as she looked intently at what she was doing.

"You take some aspirin, a little drink. Not too much though. When it's ready, the tube comes back down and the bleeding comes with it. Then, no more baby. Next time you take better care of yourself, darling."

By the time Mrs. Muñoz was finished talking she had skillfully passed the long slender catheter through my cervix into my uterus. The pain had been acute but short. It lay coiled inside of me like a cruel benefactor, soon to rupture the delicate lining and wash away my worries in blood.

Since to me all pain was beyond bearing, even this short bout seemed interminable.

"You see, now, that's all there is to it. That wasn't so bad, was it?" She patted my shuddering thigh reassuringly. "All over. Now get dressed. And wear the pad," she cautioned, as she pulled off the rubber gloves. "You start bleeding in a couple of hours, then you lie down. Here, you want the gloves back?"

I shook my head, and handed her the money. She thanked me. "That's a special price because you a friend of Anna's," she smiled, helping me on with my coat. "By this time tomorrow, it will be all over. If you have any trouble you call me. But no trouble, just a little cramps."

I stopped off on West 4th Street and bought a bottle of apricot brandy for eighty-nine cents. It was the day before my eighteenth birthday and I decided to celebrate my relief. Now all I had to do was hurt.

On the slow Saturday local back to my furnished room in Brighton Beach the cramps began, steadily increasing. Everything's going to be all right now, I kept saying to myself as I leaned over slightly on the subway seat, if I can just get through the next day. I can do it. She said it was safe. The worst is over, and if anything goes wrong I can always go to the hospital. I'll tell them I don't know her name, and I was blindfolded so I couldn't know where I was.

I wondered how bad the pain was going to get, and that terrified me more than anything else. I did not think about how I could die from hemorrhage, or a perforated uterus. The terror was only about the pain.

The subway car was almost empty.

Just last spring around that same time one Saturday morning, I woke up in my mother's house to the smell of bacon frying in the kitchen, and the abrupt realization as I opened my eyes that the dream I had been having of giving birth to a baby girl was in fact only a dream. I sat bolt upright in my bed, facing the little window onto the air shaft, and cried and cried and cried from disappointment until my mother came into the room to see what was wrong.

The train came up out of the tunnel over the bleak edge of south Brooklyn. The Coney Island parachute jump steeple and a huge grey gas storage tank were the only breaks in the leaden skyline.

I dared myself to feel any regrets.

That night about 8 P.M., I was lying curled tightly on my bed, trying to distract myself from the stabbing pains in my groin by deciding whether or not I wanted to dye my hair coal black.

I couldn't begin to think about the risks I was running. But another piece of me was being amazed at my own daring. I had done it. Even more than my leaving home, this action which was tearing my guts apart and from which I could die except I wasn't going to—this action was a kind of shift from safety towards self-preservation. It was a choice of pains. That's what living was all about. I clung to that and tried to feel only proud.

I had not given in. I had not been merely the eye on the ceiling until it was too late. They hadn't gotten me.

There was a tap on the alley door, and I looked out the window. My friend Blossom from school had gotten one of our old high school teachers to drive her out to see if I was "okay," and to bring me a bottle of peach brandy for my birthday. She was one of the people I had consulted, and she had wanted to have nothing to do with an abortion, saying I should have the baby. I didn't bother to tell her Black babies were not adopted. They were absorbed into families, abandoned, or "given up." But not adopted. Nonetheless I knew she was worried to have come all the way from Queens to Manhattan and then to Brighton Beach.

I was touched.

We only talked about inconsequential things. Never a word about what was going on inside of me. Now it was my secret; the only way I could handle it was alone. I sensed they were both grateful that I did.

"You sure you're going to be okay?" Bloss asked. I nodded.

Miss Burman suggested we go for a walk along the boardwalk in the crisp February darkness. There was no moon. The walk helped a little, and so did the brandy. But when we got back to

my room, I couldn't concentrate on their conversation any more. I was too distracted by the rage gnawing at my belly.

"Do you want us to go?" Bloss asked with her characteristic bluntness. Miss Burman, sympathetic but austere, stood quietly in the doorway looking at my posters. I nodded at Bloss gratefully. Miss Burman lent me five dollars before she left.

The rest of the night was an agony of padding back and forth along the length of the hallway from my bedroom to the bathroom, doubled over in pain, watching clots of blood fall out of my body into the toilet and wondering if I was all right, after all. I had never seen such huge red blobs come from me before. They scared me. I was afraid I might be bleeding to death in that community bathroom in Brighton Beach in the middle of the night of my eighteenth birthday, with a crazy old lady down the hall muttering restlessly in her sleep. But I was going to be all right. Soon this was all going to be over, and I would be safe.

I watched one greyish mucous shape disappear in the bowl, wondering if that was the embryo.

By dawn, when I went to take some more aspirin, the catheter had worked its way out of my body. I was bleeding heavily, very heavily. But my experience in the OB wards told me that I was not hemorrhaging.

I washed the long stiff catheter and laid it away in a drawer, after examining it carefully. This implement of my salvation was a wicked red, but otherwise innocuous-looking.

I took an amphetamine in the thin morning sun and wondered if I should spend a quarter on some coffee and a danish. I remembered I was supposed to usher at a Hunter College concert that same afternoon, for which I was to be paid ten dollars, a large sum for an afternoon's work, and one that would enable me to repay my debts to Ann and Miss Burman.

I made myself some sweet milky coffee and took a hot bath, even though I was bleeding. After that, the pain dimmed gradually to a dull knocking gripe.

On a sudden whim, I got up and threw on some clothes and went out into the morning. I took the bus into Coney Island to an early-morning foodshop near Nathan's, and had myself a huge birthday breakfast, complete with french fries and an english muffin. I hadn't had a regular meal in a restaurant for a long time. It cost almost half of Miss Burman's five dollars, because it was kosher and expensive. And delicious.

Afterward, I returned home. I lay resting upon my bed, filled with a sense of well-being and relief from pain and terror that was almost euphoric. I really was all right.

As the morning slipped into afternoon, I realized that I was exhausted. But the thought of making ten dollars for one afternoon's work got me wearily up and back onto the weekend local train for the long trip to Hunter College.

By mid-afternoon my legs were quivering. I walked up and down the aisles dully, hardly hearing the string quartet. In the last part of the concert, I went into the ladies room to change my tampax and the pads I was wearing. In the stall, I was seized with a sudden wave of nausea that bent me double, and I promptly and with great force lost my $2.50-with-tip Coney Island breakfast, which I had never digested. Weakened and shivering, I sat on the stool, my head against the wall. A fit of renewed cramps swept through me so sharply that I moaned softly.

Miz Lewis, the Black ladies-room attendant who had known me from the bathrooms of Hunter High School, was in the back of the room in her cubby, and she had seen me come into the otherwise empty washroom.

"Is that you, Autray, moaning like that? You all right?" I saw her low-shoed feet stop outside my stall.

"Yes ma'am," I gasped through the door, cursing my luck to have walked into that particular bathroom. "It's just my period."

I steadied myself, and arranged my clothes. When I finally stepped out, bravely and with my head high, Miz Lewis was still standing outside, her arms folded.

She had always maintained a steady but impersonal interest in the lives of the few Black girls at the high school, and she was a familiar face which I was glad to see when I met her in the washroom of the college in the autumn. I told her I was going to the college now, and that I had left home. Miz Lewis had raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips, shaking her grey head. "You girls sure are somethin'!" she'd said.

In the uncompromising harshness of the fluorescent lights, Miz Lewis gazed at me intently through her proper gold spectacles, which perched upon her broad brown nose like round antennae.

"Girl, you sure you all right? Don't sound all right to me." She peered up into my face. "Sit down here a minute. You just started? You white like some other people's child."

I took her seat, gratefully. "I'm all right, Miz Lewis," I protested. "I just have bad cramps, that's all."

"Jus' cramps? That bad? Then why you come here like that today for? You ought to be home in bed, the way your eyes looking. You want some coffee, honey?" She offered me her cup.

"Cause I need the money, Miz Lewis. I'll be all right; I really will." I shook my head to the coffee, and stood up. Another cramp slid up from my clenched thighs and rammed into the small of my back, but I only rested my head against the edge of the stalls. Then, taking a paper towel from the stack on the glass shelf in front of me, I wet it and wiped the cold sweat from my forehead. I wiped the rest of my face, and blotted my faded lipstick carefully. I grinned at my reflection in the mirror and at Miz Lewis standing to the side behind me, her arms still folded against her broad short-waisted bosom. She sucked her teeth with a sharp intake of breath and sighed a long sigh.

"Chile, why don't you go on back home to your mama, where you belong?"

I almost burst into tears. I felt like screaming, drowning out her plaintive, kindly, old-woman's voice that kept pretending everything was so simple.

"Don't you think she's worrying about you? Do she know you in all this trouble?"

"I'm not in trouble, Miz Lewis. I just don't feel well because of my period." Turning away, I crumpled up the used towel and dropped it into the basket, and then sat down again, heavily. My legs were shockingly weak.

"Yeah. Well." Miz Lewis sucked her teeth again, and put her hand into her apron pocket. "Here," she said, pulling four dollars out of her purse. "You take these and get yourself a taxi home." She knew I lived in Brooklyn. "And you go right home, now. I'll cross your name off the list downstairs for you. And you can pay me back when you get it."

I took the crumpled bills from her dark, work-wise hands. "Thanks a lot, Miz Lewis," I said gratefully. I stood up again, this time a little more steadily. "But don't you worry about me, this won't last very long." I walked shakily to the door.

"And you put your feet up, and a cold compress on your tummy, and you stay in bed for a few days, too," she called after me, as I made my way to the elevators to the main floor.

I asked the cab to take me around to the alley entrance, instead of getting out on Brighton Beach Avenue. I was afraid my

legs might not take me where I wanted to go. I wondered if I had almost fainted.

Once indoors, I took three aspirin and slept for twenty-four hours.

When I awoke Monday afternoon, the bed-sheets were stained, but my bleeding had slowed to normal and the cramps were gone.

I wondered if I had gotten some bad food at the foodshop Sunday morning that had made me sick. Usually I never got upset stomachs, and prided myself on my cast-iron digestion. The following day I went back to school.

On Friday, after classes, before I went to work, I picked up my money for ushering. I sought out Miz Lewis in the auditorium washroom and paid her back her four dollars.

"Oh, thank you, Autray," she said, looking a little surprised. She folded the bills up neatly and tucked them back into the green snap-purse she kept in her uniform apron pocket. "How you feeling?"

"Fine, Miz Lewis," I said jauntily. "I told you I was going to be all right."

"You did not! You said you *was* all right and I knew you wasn't, so don't tell me none of that stuff, I don't want to hear." Miz Lewis eyed me balefully.

"You gon' back home to your mama, yet?"

23

I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell.

There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone, like our sister Amazons, the riders on the loneliest outposts of the kingdom of Dahomey. We, young and Black and fine and gay, sweated out our first heartbreaks with no school nor office chums to share that confidence over lunch hour. Just as there were no rings to make tangible the reason for our happy secret smiles, there were no names nor reason given or shared for the tears that messed up the lab reports or the library bills.

We were good listeners, and never asked for double dates, *but didn't we know the rules*? Why did we always seems to think friendships between women were important enough to *care* about? Always we moved in a necessary remoteness that made "What did you do this weekend?" seem like an impertinent

Downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and an invisible Black. Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder. Maybe four people altogether knew I wrote poetry, and I usually made it pretty easy for them to forget.

It was not that I didn't have friends, and good ones. There was a loose group of young lesbians, white except for Flee and I, who hung out together, apart from whatever piece of the straight world we each had a separate place in. We not only believed in the reality of sisterhood, that word which was to be so abused two decades later, but we also tried to put it into practice, with varying results. We all cared for and about each other, sometimes with more or less understanding, regardless of who was entangled with whom at any given time, and there was always a place to sleep and something to eat and a listening ear for anyone who wandered into the crew. And there was always somebody calling you on the telephone, to interrupt the fantasies of suicide. That is as good a working definition of friend as most.

However imperfectly, we tried to build a community of sorts where we could, at the very least, survive within a world we correctly perceived to be hostile to us; we talked endlessly about how best to create that mutual support which twenty years later was being discussed in the women's movement as a brand-new concept. Lesbians were probably the only Black and white women in New York City in the fifties who were making any real attempt to communicate with each other; we learned lessons from each other, the values of which were not lessened by what we did not learn.

For both Flee and me, it seemed that loving women was something that other Black women just didn't do. And if they did, then it was in some fashion and in some place that was to-

tally inaccessible to us, because we could never find them. Except for Saturday nights in the Bagatelle, where neither Flee nor I was stylish enough to be noticed.

(My straight Black girlfriends, like Jean and Crystal, either ignored my love for women, considered it interestingly avant-garde, or tolerated it as just another example of my craziness. It was allowable as long as it wasn't too obvious and didn't reflect upon them in any way. At least my being gay kept me from being a competitor for whatever men happened to be upon their horizons. It also made me much more reliable as a confidante. I never asked for anything more.)

But only on the full moon or every other Wednesday was I ever convinced that I really wanted it different. A bunch of us—maybe Nicky and Joan and I—would all be standing around having a beer at the Bagatelle, trying to decide whether to inch onto the postage-stamp dance floor for a slow intimate fish, garrison belt to pubis and rump to rump (but did we really want to get that excited after a long weekend with work tomorrow?), when I'd say sorry but I was tired and would have to leave now, which in reality meant I had an already late paper for english due the next day and needed to work on it all that night.

That didn't happen too often because I didn't go to the Bag very much. It was the most popular gay-girl's bar in the Village, but I hated beer, and besides the bouncer was always asking me for my ID to prove I was twenty-one, even though I was older than the other women with me. Of course "you can never tell with Colored people." And we would all rather die than have to discuss the fact that it was because I was Black, since, of course, gay people weren't racists. After all, didn't they know what it was like to be oppressed?

Sometimes we'd pass Black women on Eighth Street—*the invisible but visible sisters*—or in the Bag or at Laurel's, and our glances might cross, but we never looked into each other's eyes. We acknowledged our kinship by passing in silence, looking the other way. Still, we were always on the lookout, Flee and I, for that telltale flick of the eye, that certain otherwise prohibited openness of expression, that definiteness of voice which would suggest, I think she's gay. *After all, doesn't it take one to know one*?

I was gay and Black. The latter fact was irrevocable: armor, mantle, and wall. Often, when I had the bad taste to bring that

fact up in a conversation with other gay-girls who were not Black, I would get the feeling that I had in some way breached some sacred bond of gayness, a bond which I always knew was not sufficient for me.

This was not to deny the closeness of our group, nor the mutual aid of those insane, glorious, and contradictory years. It is only to say that I was acutely conscious—from the ID "problem" at the Bag on Friday nights to the summer days at Gay Head Beach where I was the only one who wouldn't worry about burning—that my relationship as a Black woman to our shared lives was different from theirs, and would be, gay or straight. The question of acceptance had a different weight for me.

In a paradoxical sense, once I accepted my position as different from the larger society as well as from any single sub-society—Black or gay—I felt I didn't have to try so hard. To be accepted. To look femme. To be straight. To look straight. To be proper. To look "nice." To be liked. To be loved. To be approved. What I didn't realize was how much harder I had to try merely to stay alive, or rather, to stay human. How much stronger a person I became in that trying.

But in this plastic, anti-human society in which we live, there have never been too many people buying fat Black girls born almost blind and ambidextrous, gay or straight. Unattractive, too, or so the ads in *Ebony* and *Jet* seemed to tell me. Yet I read them anyway, in the bathroom, on the newsstand, at my sister's house, whenever I got a chance. It was a furtive reading, but it was an affirmation of some part of me, however frustrating.

If nobody's going to dig you too tough anyway, it really doesn't matter so much what you dare to explore. I had already begun to learn that when I left my parents' house.

Like when your Black sisters on the job think you're crazy and collect money between themselves to buy you a hot comb and straightening iron on their lunch hour and stick it anonymously into your locker in the staff room, so that later when you come down for a coffee break and open your locker the damn things fall out on the floor with a clatter and all ninety-five percent of your library co-workers who are very very white want to know what it's all about.

Like when your Black brother calls you a ball-buster and tricks you up into his apartment and tries to do it to you against the kitchen cabinets just, as he says, to take you down a peg or two, when all the time you'd only gone up there to begin with fully intending to get a little in the first place (because all the girls I knew who were possibilities were too damn complicating,

and I was plain and simply horny as hell). I finally got out of being raped although not mauled by leaving behind a ring and a batch of lies and it was the first time in my life since I'd left my parents' house that I was in a physical situation which I couldn't handle physically—in other words, the bastard was stronger than I was. It was an instantaneous consciousness-raiser.

As I say, when the sisters think you're crazy and embarrassing; and the brothers want to break you open to see what makes you work inside; and the white girls look at you like some exotic morsel that has just crawled out of the walls onto their plate (but don't they love to rub their straight skirts up against the edge of your desk in the college literary magazine office after class); and the white boys all talk either money or revolution but can never quite get it up—then it doesn't really matter too much if you have an Afro long before the word even existed.

Pearl Primus, the African-American dancer, had come to my high school one day and talked about African women after class, and how beautiful and natural their hair looked curling out into the sun, and as I sat there listening (one of fourteen Black girls in Hunter High School) I thought, that's the way god's mother must have looked and I want to look like that too so help me god. In those days I called it a natural, and kept calling it natural when everybody else called it crazy. It was a strictly homemade job done by a Sufi Muslim on 125th Street, trimmed with the office scissors and looking pretty raggedy. When I came home from school that day my mother beat my behind and cried for a week.

Even for years afterward white people would stop me on the street or particularly in Central Park and ask if I was Odetta, a Black folksinger whom I did not resemble at all except that we were both big Black beautiful women with natural heads.

Besides my father, I am the darkest one in my family and I've worn my hair natural since I finished high school.

Once I moved to East Seventh Street, every morning that I had the fifteen cents I would stop into the Second Avenue Griddle on the corner of St. Mark's Place on my way to the subway and school and buy an english muffin and coffee. When I didn't have the money, I would just have coffee. It was a tiny little counter place run by an old Jewish man named Sol who'd been a seaman (among other things) and Jimmy, who was Puerto Rican and washed dishes and who used to remind Sol to save me the hard englishes on Monday; I could have them for a dime.

In the meantime, Muriel and I corresponded. To be more exact, Muriel wrote long and beautiful letters and I read and cherished them in silence.

Muriel's lyrical and revealing letters held a hunger and an isolation that matched my own, and a precious unfolding of her humorous and prismatic vision. I came to marvel and delight in the new view she afforded me of simple and unexpected things. Re-seeing the world through her unique scrutinies was like re-

seeing the world through my first pair of glasses when I was a child. Endless and wonderful re-discoveries of the ordinary.

There was a pain in Muriel to become herself that engaged my heart. I knew what it was like to be haunted by the ghost of a self one wished to be, but only half-sensed. Sometimes her words both thrilled me and made me weep.

Snail-sped an up-hill day, but evening comes; I dream of you. This shepherd is a leper learning to make lovely things while waiting out my time of despair. I feel a new kind of sickness now, which I know is the fever of wanting to be whole.

My hands shook a little as I put the letter down and poured myself another cup of coffee. Each day I would rush to my mailbox after work, looking for one of her thick blue envelopes.

Slowly but surely, Muriel became more and more like a vulnerable piece of myself. I could cherish and protect this piece because it was outside of me. Hedging my emotional bets, inside safe and undisturbed. With each of Muriel's letters there blossomed within me the need to do for her what I never really believed I could do for myself, even while I was in the midst of doing it.

I could take care of Muriel. I could make the world work for her, if not for myself.

With no intent and less insight, I fashioned this girl of wind and ravens into a symbol of surrogate survival, and fell into love like a stone off a cliff.

I sent Muriel little scraps of paper with pieces of poems on them. Some were about her, some were not. Nobody could tell the difference. Muriel told me later she was convinced I was quite mad, also. I counted the days between her letters which brought me pieces of herself like special and anticipated gifts On December 21st, in answer to her entreaties and the solstice, I sent her a greeting card of a greek urn filled with stones which read, "I must have rocks in my head."

By that I meant I loved her.

More than twenty years later I meet Muriel at a poetry reading at a women's coffee-house in New York. Her voice is still soft, but her great brown eyes are not. I tell her, "I am writing an unfolding of my life and loves."

"Just make sure you tell the truth about me," she says.

It was New Year's Eve, the last day of 1954. Rhea was in love again, and had gone out for the evening and I imagined for the rest of the night. I had settled down to reading and writing and music when the phone rang.

"Happy New Year!" It was Muriel. "Are you going to be in this old evening?"

My voice was jittery with anticipation and unexpected surprise. "Yes, some friends are coming over later. Can you come too? Where are you?"

"At home, but I'm catching the next train." I heard her warm half-laugh and could almost see the trickle of smoke and the fold between her eyes. "I've got something to ask you."

"What is it?" I asked, wondering.

"Nope, have to do it in person. I gotta run now."

Two hours later in she walked, bereted and smoking. The apartment was bustling with laughter and the voice of Rosemary Clooney.

Hey there,
you with the stars
in your eyes
love never made
a fool of you

I ran to take her jacket. "It's so good to see you," I said.

"Yeah? That's what I came down to find out, because I couldn't understand that card. What did it mean?"

Bea and Lynn and Gloria had dropped by with wine and reefer, and I introduced them to Muriel as I poured her a glass of Chianti. Bea and Lynn were dancing belt-to-belt in the middle room; Muriel, Gloria, and I munched over the cartons of savory chinese food which they had brought with them.

At a few minutes to midnight, we switched off the tinny portable phono and turned on the radio to hear the cheer go up in Times Square to greet 1955, even while we were saying how square that all was. Muriel gave me a copy of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, an underground bestseller which she'd lifted, she said, from a Stamford bookstore. Then we all kissed each other, and had some more wine.

We turned the music back on, and people told wild stories about other New Year's Eves. I had to admit that this was my first New Year's Eve party ever, but I managed to say it in a way that nobody believed me.

By 3:00 A.M., everybody had decided to spend the night. I rolled out Rhea's double bed in the front room, and opened up my couch in the middle room. There was a place for everyone. I finally had to slip Lynn a sleeping pill from my hoard of doctor's samples, because she kept insisting she wasn't sleepy, and I was determined to be the last one awake. It had been a heady evening for me, and even with amphetamine, I was getting sleepy.

Muriel had gone to bed in the middle room with all her clothes on, because this was a strange house filled with strange people, she said, drolly, and she was very shy. The other three sacked out in the front room. I had assumed Rhea would stay over at her boyfriend's house. Unfortunately, Rhea and Art had their big fight that night.

At 4:00 A.M., just about the time everyone had finally settled down and I had crawled into my faded green studio couch beside Muriel, just about that time I heard Rhea's key in the door.

I jumped up, instantly awake. Oh shit. Pulling on my shirt, I tiptoed into the kitchen to find my roommate standing forlornly, her bright party dress wrinkled and sad. Rhea was addicted to having affairs with men who were only interested in shafting her, literally and figuratively. She was in tears. Art had told her, while they were in bed, that he was going to be married to the nineteen-year old daughter of one of their progressive comrades. At thirty-one, Rhea was sure it was her age. On the other hand, I was sure it was because he was getting some from Rhea and not getting some from his teenager. But I couldn't say that to Rhea in her condition.

Half my mind, besides, was on the collection of people in the house and how was I going to explain them to Rhea? Not that I had to explain, really, but after all it was her bed that Bea and Lynn and Gloria were sharing.

"That's awful, Rhea," I said as I took her coat. "Let me heat up some coffee."

"It'll be all right," Rhea said abstractedly, wiping her eyes and managing a brave little smile. Her long voluptuous black hair was all awry. "I just want to go to bed for now."

"Well," I hesitated only a moment, "There're some people in your bed, honey; some friends came over and you said you didn't think you'd be home. . ."

Tears welled up in Rhea's eyes again as she reached distractedly for her pocketbook and the shoes which she'd so gallantly dyed to match her dress, an electric-blue taffeta, just a few hours before.

"But I'll wake them right up," I said hurriedly, as I saw her heading for the front door. Her cousin lived two floors down, but I could never bear to see Rhea cry. "I'm getting them right up."

And that's exactly what I did, posthaste.

Sleepily, the three girls moved, and we all crawled back into bed, spoon-wise, in the middle room with Muriel. Rhea went to her troubled sleep in her own bed. By this time, it was almost dawn and too late for me to sleep any more. Anyway, I had gotten my second wind. And I loved being the first one up in the mornings. I took some obetrol and sat reading in the john until dawn.

Tiptoeing past the sleeping women, I leaned out of the seventh-story front window, looking eastward through the still streets to the lightening sky. The air was mild for January, and I caught a faint whiff of malt from the Hartz Mountain birdseed factory across the East River. The January thaw. It reminded me with a start that spring was only three months away. Yet it seemed forever. I was tired of winter.

I switched on the radio softly; on this holiday morning it was mostly stale news, except for the automobile fatalities and the results of the recent congressional censure of McCarthy. As I listened to the weather report, unseasonably warm, I cleaned my sneakers with a dash of dry Dutch Cleanser, rubbed in with an old toothbrush. Cleaned shoes was a New Year's Day ritual that I carried over from my parents' house without question or consideration.

At 8:30 A.M. I woke everyone except Rhea. I was eager to start the day. "Who needs a toothbrush?" I called, breaking out the little store of them which I kept for such occasions. I was secretly pleased to have Muriel see how in charge I was of all situations. Always prepared, too. Just like the Marines' motto.

Everybody knew a thirty-five-year old woman could run any world, and I considered myself to be permanently in practice.

I made coffee the way I used to do it in Mexico, using very little coffee and straining it through the little fabric net which I'd brought home with me. I turned off the radio and started the phonograph, putting on Roberta Sherwood's "Cry Me a River" real low, so as not to disturb Rhea's fretful, sighing sleep. The rest of us sat around the table in the kitchen near the shaft window drinking coffee. Muriel's sturdy feet stuck out beneath the cuffs of her jeans, her broad toes moving up and down in time to the music as her soft musical laugh moved

through the smoke of her ever-present cigarette. Bea and Lynn in their dungarees and flannel shirts; and Gloria, her flamboyant spanish huaraches over woolen stockings and her baggy peasant pants made from handwoven magenta cotton. The click of Gloria's fruitwood necklaces and bracelets was a contrapuntal echo behind the morning's conversations of politics, gay-girl gossip, and the advent and use of the new tranquilizers in mental hospitals.

The house grew even warmer as the steam came up, and I got up to fix us a beautiful New Year's breakfast. I mixed our last two eggs, well-beaten, into the leftover chinese food, added a drizzle of the foo yong gravy and some powdered milk, and scrambled it all together with a healthy amount of chopped onions quailed in margarine with lots of paprika and a dash of dill for color. It was a dish reminiscent of the Sunday-morning concoction of eggs, onions, and scraped chicken livers which my father called entre and which he used to cook for us each weekend while my mother and the three of us were at Sunday Mass.

After breakfast, we exchanged long goodbyes and Happy New Years, and the other three left. Muriel and I sat talking in the kitchen over cups of black coffee, because all the powdered milk was used up.

Rhea woke up about noon, and I introduced her to Muriel. We made Rhea some coffee, and she and Muriel argued the pros and cons of Marxism (although Muriel insisted she was apolitical, which I translated as naïve) for about an hour while I took a bath. Rhea dressed and went off to her parents' house for dinner, only a little sodden around the eyes.

I turned off the record player and double-locked the door. Then Muriel and I, with no more to-do about it, went to bed with each other in the New Year's watery sunlight in Rhea's front room double bed. The afternoon unfolded into a blossom of loving from which she rose to me like a flame.

I had not been close to a woman since those nights with Eudora in Cuernavaca more than six months before.

We lay entwined and exhausted afterward, laughing and talking excitedly. The camaraderie and warmth between us breached places within me that had been closed off and permanently sealed, I thought, when Genevieve died.

When Muriel and I talked, as we did, about Naomi and Genevieve, each dead at fifteen, the spirit of those two dead girls seemed to rise up from the earth, bless us, and then depart. A

particular and terrible loneliness seemed at last about to give way.

We made love over and over and over again, pausing only to turn on the lights in the early dusk and to feed the cat. The sun went down and the steam came up, and the whole room seemed alight with the fragrance of our bodies.

For every secret hurt of Muriel's, there was one of mine to match, and the similarities of our lonelinesses, as well as of our dreams, convinced us that we were made for each other.

January 2, 1955.

I rolled over and raised myself up on one arm, regarded the sleep-sweet cheek and tousled hair of the woman curled away from me, one arm under her head. I bent to kiss the curl that swept over her ear, and ran my tongue slowly down the nape of her dark hair to where the covers draped her shoulders.

With a sigh and a slow smile, Muriel opened one eye as I advanced, whispering, toward her ear. "In the West Indies, they call this raising your zandalee."

Later, I called Mrs. Goodrich from bed, Muriel drowsing beside me. I explained that I was sick and could not come in to work. The whole department had been warned by Mrs. Goodrich the last day before the holidays to make sure that such "sicknesses" did not occur, under any circumstances.

Mrs. Goodrich fired me on the spot.

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Rhea had all the cues she needed about my relationships with women. She had witnessed the melodrama with Bea. But on the surface, Rhea did not *know* I was gay, and I did not *tell* her. Homosexuality was outside the party line at that time; therefore, Rhea defined it as "bad," and her approval was important to me. Without words, we both more or less agreed never to allude to what was obviously the guiding passion of my life, my involvement with those female friends to whom Rhea always referred as "your cool-voiced young women."

Rhea and I loved each other, yet she would have professed horror had she been forced to imagine an extension of our love into the physical.

Epilogue

Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me—so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her. And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where work begins. Another meeting.

A year later, I finished library school. The first summer of a new decade was waning as I walked away from Seventh Street for the last time, leaving that door unlocked for whatever person came after me who needed shelter. There were four half-finished poems scribbled on the bathroom wall between the toilet and the bathtub, others in the window jambs and the floorboards under the flowered linoleum, mixed up with the ghosts of rich food smells.

The casing of this place had been my home for seven years, the amount of time it takes for the human body to completely renew itself, cell by living cell. And in those years my life had become increasingly a bridge and field of women. *Zami.*

Zami. A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers.

We carry our traditions with us. Buying boxes of Red Cross Salt and a fresh corn straw broom for my new apartment in Westchester: new job, new house, new living the old in a new way. Recreating in words the women who helped give me substance.

Ma-Liz, DeLois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda, and Genevieve; MawuLisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become.

Their names, selves, faces feed me like corn before labor. I live each of them as a piece of me, and I choose these words with the same grave concern with which I choose to push speech into poetry, the mattering core, the forward visions of all our lives.

Once *home* was a long way off, a place I had never been to but knew out of my mother's mouth. I only discovered its latitudes when Carriacou was no longer my home.

There it is said that the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother's blood.

Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*

Audre Lorde

THERE ARE MANY kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence.

It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power.

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values

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this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters.

But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.

It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society is to encourage excellence. But giving in to the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies.

This internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process. For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion,

we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness.

The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible. Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision – a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.

Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex. And the lack of concern for the erotic root and satisfactions of our work is felt in our disaffection from so much of what we do. For instance, how often do we truly love our work even at its most difficult?

The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need – the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love. But this is tantamount to blinding a painter and then telling her to improve her work, and to enjoy the act of painting. It is not only next to impossible, it is also profoundly cruel.

As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different. I am speaking here of the necessity for reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and of our work, and of how we move toward and through them.

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

There are frequent attempts to equate pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual. Because

of these attempts, it has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. "What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a meditating gunrunner?" In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation.

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic – the sensual – those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, "It feels right to me," acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether

it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.

That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*.

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience.

We have been raised to fear the *yes* within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to

suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women.

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.

And yes, there is a hierarchy. There is a difference between painting a back fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love.

This brings me to the last consideration of the erotic. To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse.

In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized. The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within

the european-american tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed erotic comings-together. These occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away, a pretense of calling them something else, whether a religion, a fit, mob violence, or even playing doctor. And this misnaming of the need and the deed give rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity – the abuse of feeling.

When we look away from the importance of the erotic in the development and sustenance of our power, or when we look away from ourselves as we satisfy our erotic needs in concert with others, we use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connection with our similarities and our differences. To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd.

The erotic cannot be felt secondhand. As a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.

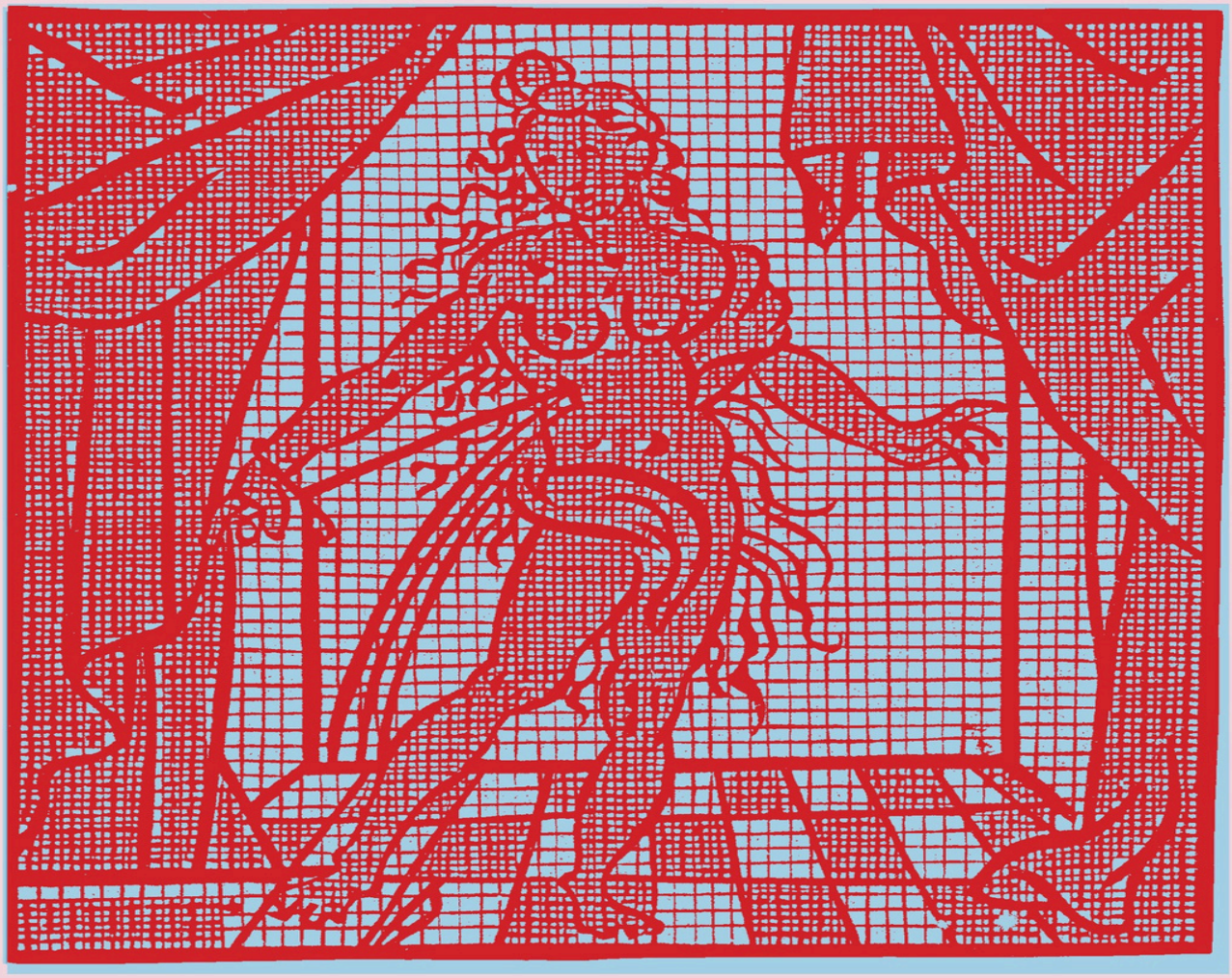
But this erotic charge is not easily shared by women who continue to operate under an exclusively european-american male tradition. I know it was not available to me when I was trying to adapt my consciousness to this mode of living and sensation.

Only now, I find more and more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange. Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.

THE FIFTH WOUND

AURORA MATTIA



VI.

BECOMING HORSE GIRLS

The room stank of semen and smoke and whiskey, of saddle leather, shit and cheap soap.
– ANNIE PROULX, BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

Do you think all lovers feel like they're inventing something?
– CÉLINE SCIAMMA, PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE

Just before I flew to him, he said:
—I need you to heal me.
I was in New York. A couple days before I'd been on one of the best first dates of my life, for twenty-four hours. She wrote me a letter, a poem that I keep on my altar. She covered me with bruises. We joined her friends at bar after bar. At one dive, a reality star held my tits. Like, my tits were out and she was squeezing them slowly, saying 'you have really nice tits…' My lover and I talked to a lot of strangers in between kisses. We told everyone we met that we were engaged, about to be married. Everyone was so happy for us.
But she lived in another city, so we said, for now, goodbye.
And I slept for a day.
Then Ezekiel called me. He had problems. Boy problems and friend problems and, half on account of the former, half on account of thedream of heavenly completion, problems with his soul. The sort of problem that belongs to god in an unutterable opacity far too crystalglittering to be printed here. I gave him advice that eased the pain, and promised him respite from the ruins of his circumstances.
He said,

—This is the first time in two years I'm having anyone in my bed.
And then I flew to him, and he drove me past fields of wheat and welcomed me into his blue house, where I held and kissed him with sweetness, and he took me to a bar in a red barn where we played Cowboy Junkies and Kate Bush on the jukebox, kissing, holding hands, him telling me the story of how he became a poet, the story of who he had become to the friends and lovers he'd met there, and who he would, later that evening at another bar, introduce me to, arm in arm, everyone wondering why a gay boy was romancing this mysterious woman from somewhere else. And I said,

—I will take care of you if you will take care of me.

On the second day, in a green field, near a handpainted sign that read Pirates & Villains Only, attempting to demythologize our discourse, foregoing any abstraction of shadow or obliquity, shedding my peacock feathers, I said, just above a whisper, because my throat was sore and my lungs were aching, and because I wanted to make it easy, to make it simple, just for once:

—If I get sicker, I will need you to look at me gently and tell me everything will be okay,
and he promised, he repeated our oath. His eyes were spangled and dazzling because I'd done his shadow again. We held hands. We were alone in the green grass. No one saw us. The wind blew. He read me part of a poem by Fanny Howe:

'Triggers follow feelings but precede acting on them
A feeling triggers a feeling, then the heft
Of the hand to work

A human face is pressed on glass; mirrors like armor
Break shapes into targets
The woman's face on the other side of this pane—
Paper or fate?
Written in light, in either case'

Back in his bedroom it was afternoon. We were something old and something new. We were covert like bunnies. We were perfect like swans. We were Easy and Aura and no one was watching. At last I was far from the city—far from all the eyes pressed against the glass of the hot girl hothouse. I was in love with him, in love with the fantasy of loving him in his quiet blue home, where he made himself scrambled eggs in the morning, where he wrote the poems he sent me, where his scent was not a dense and fragile trace left on a pair of boxers but the very air and atmosphere of all affection. I didn't care that I was getting sick. The afternoon was gentle and full of autumn. The leaves were gilded like illuminated manuscripts. Soon he would teach a poetry class to undergraduates, but just then we were rustling in his bedsheets, Easy flung back on the pillow, me between his legs, wearing his baseball cap backwards to hold my chestnut curls, sucking his cock like I was writing a love letter—wild and relentless and delicate.

He bucked hard against my mouth.

His cum was sweet, somehow, sweet as the juice of a pear, even after all his cigarettes.

—That felt so good, he said,

in a daze of surprised pleasure. Then he fingered me for half a minute and, at risk of running late, left to teach his class.

When he returned, I asked for his help dilating, because Ezekiel wanted our sex to be spontaneous, experimental and fanciful, but in order to be spontaneous, in accord with the exigencies of my cunt, I have to prepare carefully, I require advance notice, because ever since the night a man broke it, I bleed every time I try to pry my pussy. Dilating alone is invariably more painful. Door in the mountain. Let me in.

I started reading a book aloud to distract both of us.

After a few minutes, he said, "I'm sorry, I'm dissociating…"

Behind the twinkling, I saw sorrow in the lines of his face. I said not to worry, that it was okay, and we went for a walk to the cemetery

instead. Deer pranced among the gravestones. We pushed against the stone door of a mausoleum.

—I fear death, I said, but I do not fear the dead.

But the dead said nothing.

Now all at once a perfect pain was brushing my skull like the soft noxious tentacles of a jellyfish, lacerating my forehead so delicately I was left breathless. My body shuddered. I clawed at the pain. Clawed at my breasts because my lungs were burning. I was howling. Ezekiel was halfway to Jupiter. He was looking at nothing with taxidermy eyes. He was holding me rigidly as if his limbs were the limbs of a deer. He wasn't speaking. My fever was rising.

I was afraid I had made a mistake by visiting my West Texas walker-after-midnight, recollecting the day, thirteen years ago, when my mother had confided in me, at the beginning of a three-hour car ride, that she feared, if she got sick, my father wouldn't know how to take care of her. I remembered her fear with nausea, because I was beginning to understand what she meant, was all at once realizing how, in matters of intimate idiom and amorous agon, Ezekiel (a Gemini) reminded me of my father (a Scorpio), and I (a Scorpio) reminded myself of my mother (a Gemini). Suddenly, far from my home and my life with Noel, sick in a strange bed beside someone I, in a day-to-day sense, hardly knew at all, I was realizing—one lover after another having placed their faith in my mysticism, having believed, because of the force of my believing, that I could echolocate the glade of dancing nymphs—I really had no idea what I was doing. Ezekiel was always complimenting my capacity for making meaning, but that night I was too delirious to mythmake. Pain was neutralizing me.

I couldn't override my confusion with visions. I needed to know which shadows of ours were boxing in the darkroom—needed to know what was passing unsaid between us. Because he still hadn't acknowledged having said, on our very first date, the third time we attempted to be lovers:

—You are pretty but not beautiful,
while we sat outside the Bluebonnet Cafe in Marble Falls at dusk
as the world turned blue, having shared my secret favorite: banana
cream pie. In the year and a half of our phone calls he had simply
begun praying to me—and to the advertisements I posted on Twitter,
the images and ten-second video clips of me sucking on a lover's
balls with a full face of makeup, eyelashes elongated with tiny threads
of cashmere; or dressed in a corset, playing with my pussy at my
writing desk; or just after cumming, pressing my breasts like fresh
dough, seducing the future with my emerald eyes, with my messy
black eyeliner, with the burning pink blush of my cheeks, glistening,
etherealized—had simply begun praying to me as if my butterflying
mind were a religion unto itself, as if I were a temple of Aphrodite,
more and therefore less than human, because he desired me, too, in
the form of a fairytale (I adore you, I'm obsessed with you), rather
than as a broken girl looking for her pieces of mind.
I was arriving at the questions I'd been murmuring to myself since Ezekiel reappeared: Why all those years ago did you tell me I wasn't beautiful? And how could you love me if I wasn't beautiful to you? And how can I trust you, how can I trust what you see in me now? Do I echo some dream of yours, do I fulfill a meaning? Does a part of me proliferate your fantasy of your own future self? Which lover are you, jack of diamonds?
But instead of offering my vulnerability, instead of asking what was passing unsaid between us or which shadows of ours were shadowboxing or any of the questions howling in my mind, I said, sharply, uncertainly, through gritted teeth:
—I need pleasure too.
and after a pause, knowing as I spoke that I had selected the wrong
sentence, almost suffocating on my own words, uncertainly but
sharply, I said:
—I want pleasure now. Tonight. I had failed to meet the moment. I had disenchanted the angel realm under whose clouds we had been seeking a new and bodily

form for our love, without the interruption of past asymmetries, without the intercession of a direct address. For me to put Ezekiel on the spot like that was a betrayal of relation, was reckless and destructive. Terror seized him. He disappeared into the shadowlands.

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

He fell, he disappeared into silence, which is to say, seafoam, the inverse of sweetness, the roar and rot of an acute emptiness. A sort of Hell hidden in the body.

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference –
Where the Meanings, are –

We were sending terrified transmissions back and forth like a fog of scarlet, as if wounds had their own perfume.

—You're a taker, I said,
like I was spitting.
Leering down at me, he replied:
—And you give so generously.
In a single motion, I leapt up from the bed and grabbed him by the collar with my right hand.
—Don't you dare say that to me, I said.
But he flinched. Easy was scared of me.
I saw it clear.
I pulled my hand away, ashamed.

He went downstairs to smoke a few cigarettes on his front porch. I was reeling from fear and fever. I went down to the kitchen, found a knife and brought it up with me to bed. Whenever I am overwhelmed but I don't want to hurt myself, I get a steak knife instead of a shard

of glass. A steak knife looks dramatic but is significantly less sharp. I stare at the knife until it takes the place of a wound. So I stared. When the feeling left, I set it among a mess of stuff on his powderblue bedside table. Then I turned off the lights and breathed in the dark. He returned soon. I wondered how to get the knife back to the kitchen unnoticed. Thankfully he didn't notice it then, but he would the next morning. 'It stands for knife,' he would say. Which, truthfully, was fair. I can't expect a lover to know that a knife can, for me, by the dull sparkle of its own spectacle, mean its opposite. He turned a light on. He said my anger was a form of sexual pressure. I said that my anger wasn't about the present instant, but the accumulation of confusing and demoralizing exchanges of desire; I meant that it wasn't about sex, but about communication.

He said we had only hooked up twice since we became friends and lovers again: first in New York and now in his bed. And this second time had been unplanned, a sweet lark earlier that afternoon.

He suggested it was by chance that both times I'd sucked his cock but he'd hardly fingered me for a full minute. He said two times can't be called a pattern.

He said he thought I liked sucking his cock. I said of course I liked sucking his cock, but it was naïve of him to mistake my passionate cocksucking as simply and solely a matter of desire. Cocksucking was an exertion of love.

Easy sat in silence, with his hands in his lap and his head hung low. He was crying. I had never seen him cry. But he was crying, he was saying that he didn't know how to touch another person. It was one thing to accept pleasure. Accepting pleasure required remaining at rest, it was a question of building sensations in a Midnight Zone; the difficulty was internal. Giving pleasure was relational; there was no looking away. You had to stare down at someone desperate to experience pleasure, someone not pretending to be measured, someone whose desires were so direct that, from the distance of dissociation, they appeared (in fits and flashes of which I felt ashamed) frightening and grotesque, all the more so if you loved them

—all the more so if desire was dangerous, if love was rare and precious, if you felt compelled to protect love from the danger of desire despite your equal and opposite resistance to that particular form of dichotomizing panic. Giving pleasure meant not being ashamed of reality, which required either transforming reality or allowing reality to be true without disbelieving in the dream. But mostly reality felt like a negation—total and inert.

—I don't have any sense of my own body, he said.

And then:

—When we have sex, I imagine that I am you.

*

And when I finally asked, he said he didn't even remember saying it, couldn't believe he would ever say it.

—It's not true, he said. I never thought that. I always thought you were beautiful.

—You read it in my book. You knew.

—You should've asked me directly.

—I didn't feel safe asking you, I said. You had the privilege of setting the terms.

—I didn't want it.

—It's not about if you wanted it or not. You go, and you return. I had no reason to believe you wouldn't vanish if I confronted you. You didn't call me for two months after telling me you loved me.

I said he was always dreaming of a highway, I said he was always walking away.

—And Ezekiel, I said. You should've asked me directly before you started reading my Twitter every day.

(Fantasy is not in itself ethical, but it is the means by which an ethics is made.)

I said:

—Before you began developing an indirect erotic relationship with my image, rather than with me.

Then I said:

—I feel like you've been manipulating me for a long time now.

And he said:

—I feel like you've been manipulating me for a long time now.

After I came to New York, your tweets took on a different tone...

He was right. Over time and despite my frequent discomfort and silent panic and every so often my genuine pleasure at his abstracted presence, I began speaking slantly to Easy through the mouth of @silicone_angel, especially after his visit in October, when I started expressing more passionate feelings and expectations about the kind of relationship awaiting us than I had the nerve to confess to Easy voice to voice, balm to balm. I tweeted about beautiful women who date femboys, transsexual sex goddesses who love fairies, being his garden of Eden cunt, etc.

—That was wrong. I shouldn't have mixed my feelings for you with my online Siren song.

(It was dissociative; more oblique than poetry, and more dangerous.)

—I'm sorry, Ezekiel.

My fever spiked in the early morning. After I convinced him of the urgency, we went to the hospital. Easy was submerged in a haze; I was experiencing a paranoia of attunement. Every so often we argued. Every so often we spat words. And though I kept my face calm and my voice even, every time I felt upset the monitor inevitably registered my racing pulse and began beeping loudly, at which time Easy would groan and mash the button repeatedly, in order to extinguish the sound of my heart.

In my hospital room, we stared for a while at a crucifix on the wall.

—The equation just doesn't make sense, he said.

I gave the crucifix the finger. Easy smiled.

—They should make statues of Judas kissing Jesus in Gethsemane, I said.

—That equation makes perfect sense, he said.

The next afternoon he woke numb, uncertain of me, and on the verge of influenza. I woke in a desperate terror, because I woke knowing immediately that we had lost each other. We had hurt each other too much. He read me a passage from Claudia Rankine's Don't Let Me Be Lonely:

'Define Loneliness?

Yes.

It's what we can't do for each other'

*

Later on, my mother called to tell me that my cousin had died at one hundred and five years old. He made sundials and gave me my first chunk of pyrite. I hadn't seen him since transition.
Then I was kissing Ezekiel and crying. I couldn't look at him. He pulled back once, then again a few seconds later, asking if I was okay, asking if I was mad at him. I couldn't talk at all, not a word—and my kisses, like little exorcisms, were too much for him to bear.
So I told him I was sad about my cousin and needed some time to think, then left with a full bottle of vodka and walked to the cemetery, where I stumbled among headstones and obelisks, singing in the moonlight to any dead who wished to lend an ear, to the wind and drifting deer, pouring vodka here and there as an offering, drinking it like water, singing I dream a highway back to you...
When I crawled into bed, desperately and somehow earnestly, with an ill-fitting sense of the sacred and a certainty, at that moment, of the holiness of our impossible passion; making a fairytale, instinctively, to delay the nightmare, the pain and terror I felt for myself, for him, for us, I said, for the first time in my life:
—I want to be your wife.

The next day he took me to the library to print out a copy of this book.
We napped through the afternoon.
We snorted Adderall and danced in his living room.
And then we held each other in his bed, gazing into one another's eyes, singing that song. I knew we had failed again. I knew he loved me and I knew it was over. The song kept playing. I cried and howled. His bluesilvering kitten leapt onto the bed and nuzzled my cheek slowly, meowing softly, purring.
—She's never done that before, said Ezekiel.

In the morning, wearing my Persephone dress and blue jeans, he drove us to McDonalds. We ate in a windswept field, then returned one last time to his blue house before I left.

*

On the phone a few days after I got home:
—This whole time I've been in a privileged position, he said. I've just been riding the high of our calls, totally oblivious. I feel sick, like I've been...
—Extracting from me?
—Exactly. How much of the last year have you felt like this?
—Not every moment, I said. But it's always been in my mind. I felt confused and frightened, Easy.
For a moment he was silent. Then:
—All this time, he said, I haven't been loved.
I was nauseated. It was another dimension of heartbreak. He could take his love from me, but he couldn't take mine from me. Please don't take it from me. My love is real, Ezekiel.
—I can be in pain and still be in love, I said.

And we went in circles like that for a long time, making ruts with the weight of our feeling, until at last he said:
—I need to be gone for a while.

—But you promised you wouldn't ever again.

—I'm the pretender, he said.

—Ezekiel please

—I'm not who I'm supposed to be.

Silver Soul was echoing in my skull.

—I don't feel safe, he said. I might even go to the psych ward. I was numb all week. I'm having a trauma response.

And then, shy but firm: —I need to disappear, trailing off like morning mist. I felt a twinge of panic like a plucked string. But it only sparked; it did not catch or resonate. Because I knew what he meant. More and more as years went by, I was withdrawing from my life, myself; more and more I was losing faith in visions; more and more I was ashamed of exposing my lovers to my destabilization, to my blanks and manias and meltdowns, to the unmodulated sound of my mind. Reality was so brittle. I lost it every day. —I understand, I said, registering my acceptance with genuine surprise. I was

heartbroken and furious, but I did not blame him.

—I understand why you need to go, Easy. I understand.

—Thank you, he said,

with a sigh of genuine relief.

—Do you know how long you'll be gone

—I don't know

—Can you promise you'll come back

—Yes. I promise.

—...Thank you for giving us another chance at love. I know how hard you were trying.

—I'm heartbroken. I've been heartbroken since you left.

—I know.

—I'm sorry we couldn't rise to meet each other this time.

—I'm scared, Easy.

—Please be safe, okay?

—I'll do my best, I promise.

—Don't die, Aurora. I need you. I need you there in the future.

—I won't, I promise.

And then, after a pause:

—Ezekiel...one day, will you rise to meet me?

—Yes, he said.

Our voices were cracking with pain.

—I love you.

—I love you, too.

And then we wished each other well.

When I was alone again, I drank a bottle of sake, took the old bloody chunk of glass from my reliquary and smashed it into shards.

Eventually Noel heard my howling and rushed to my room.

—Aurora please stop.

—I can't, I said.

—Please, they said. Give me the glass.

—I'm not done yet.

—You've done enough.

—The price is even as the grace.

Blood was making a puddle on the floor, rich and oozing. Blood had spattered a lampshade.

—Please call your mother, they said. I can't do this alone.

They said I couldn't stay at home, drinking and bleeding. In my case the next cut is always the deepest. Because that was the deepest wound anyone has ever given me—I did it with my own hands and with hours of drinking and slicing, all the while singing Bleeding Love by Leona Lewis and Hurt by Johnny Cash, or Fields of Gold by Eva Cassidy and A Song For by Townes Van Zandt. That same night I was involuntarily committed to the psych ward.

After a week I had two lovers. One of them, a nurse saw him kissing me. The nurse had already seen my chart. She shook her head. She turned to another patient and said, pointing at me,

—That's a man. He's kissing a man.

The patient told me what the nurse had said. I confronted the nurse. I said,

—If you're going to talk about me, do it to my face.

But she wouldn't look at me. So my lover was saying,

—What's your name. Tell me your goddamned name.

But she hid her nametag and left the ward, because she was 'afraid for her safety.'

One of the night staff said later that maybe if I wasn't sleeping with half the ward, I wouldn't be having problems. Another one of the night staff, Hector, held me while I cried. He was the one we all liked. He called the on-call, and asked him to come speak to me, to make it right. But the doctor refused. The doctor said I would have to get used to this sort of thing. When he hung up, Hector was crying, too.

—I'm so sorry, he said.

I walked over to the nurses' station and demanded an audience with the on-call. The nurses were behind a pane of glass. They pretended not to hear me. I pounded on the glass. The nurses called crisis. One of them said:

—Now he's coming. Are you happy?

I was wearing cowboy boots and I started kicking the front door of the ward.

My lover said,

—Baby you're going to hurt yourself.

I wanted out. I wanted to break the door so we could leave. I kept kicking but the door wouldn't cave.

Soon a group of twelve or more men filled the hall. The crisis team. Calmly, one of them said:

—You can speak with the doctor if you go to your bedroom.

—He's going to speak to me?

—Yes.

So I went.

But within seconds, the men closed in behind me, clotting my door and my room, parting only for the doctor to stroll through with a

syringe in his uplifted hand.

—I'm going to give you a sedative, said the doctor. Then we can speak.

(But the sedatives they had given me before—my first five days in the emergency ward, on a stretcher with no pillow, no privacy, and twenty-four hour brightness in a room full of stretchers, of men and women, where one man told me how converting to Islam had brought him closer to God, and we spoke for a long time, not only because he had a glint in his eyes and I had a crush on him, but also because of his manner of speaking about matters of the spirit, and, after that first man was released, another man, this one cute enough, but glintless and convinced of his Christ-given genius, told me about his in-progress 'masterpiece,' a play, 'really a philosophical romance,' about his ex-girlfriend (not a genius like him, but so kind, so good), specifically about 'space' (what his girlfriend had asked for) considered as a condition of the soul, a psycho-spiritual state as substantial as Heaven or Hell, but about which he could say no more than that, lest his 'million-dollar idea' fall into the wrong hands—the sedatives the doctors had given me in the emergency ward, and of whose risks they had not informed me, had caused muscle seizures. My body twitched and jerked painfully while my eyes and mouth were stretched wide open, as if I had been surprised by joy, as if my face were frozen in an instant of joyful surprise; and my hands and arms were locked, aloft, my fingers half-curled and my wrists bent outward as if in twin gestures of benediction; soon my eyes were blurring and I could hardly speak. I was sweating profusely, weeping, garbling my words, trying to shout: "I'm scared, I don't know what's happening to me." Until my doctor happened to walk by and said: "Oh, you're having a reaction to the sedative. Easy to fix." And injected me with a counteragent that extinguished the fit in a few minutes. "At least your eyes hadn't rolled back yet," she said. Staff noted

the reaction in my chart and wrote that I was not to be given the sedative, Q, again.)

So, naturally:

—What is that, I said.
But the doctor ignored me.
—What is that, I said. I'm allergic to Q.
He was walking toward me. The needle glinted, a drop of fluid globing on its tip. I jumped up from my bed, flashing like a diamond through the crowd of men while one after another sought to grab me until, as I reached the doorway, I fell. All at once, ripping my yellow dress and half my stitches, hands and hands were grasping at me, grabbing for me, a proliferation of hands were taking me, were bruising me with their tight grips, were lifting me in the air while I was bleeding, kicking wildly with my cowboy boots; while I was writhing, tangled in arms, screaming:

—Please, I'm allergic.

Screaming:

—Q gives me muscle seizures.

Begging:

—Please, look at my chart,

while the doctor ordered some of the crisis team to strap me down to my bed with restraints.

—Look me in the eyes, I said.

The doctor didn't look. I looked around the room at everyone, watching.
—Please, I begged.
No one said a word. The doctor ordered three men to hold my arm still for the needle. When he leaned forward, I spat in his face. The doctor recoiled. I spat again. One man covered my face with a piece of cloth. I shook it off, screaming:
—Fuck you, you fucking cunt.
The doctor left the room. He 'refused to be spoken to like that.' He sent a nurse in his place. She was wearing a face shield.

—Stay the fuck away from me, I said.

—A woman wouldn't talk like that, said another nurse.

—At least I'm not ugly like you, I said. People pay to see my pussy. And I had a bigger cock than any of the men in this room.

The nurse with the face shield approached while the men held me down on all sides. She said:

—I'm not giving you Q, I promise.

She'd been staring at me with alarm and faint disgust since she first saw me days before. Even so, I let her give me the shots.

Then everyone left.

One of the men was carrying my boots.

I was alone in my room. Minutes passed.

Until I felt it. First a tingling in my arms and legs,

then an ache, then spasms:

—Help, I yelled. Help, it's happening again,

but no one came.

I was twisting the restraints with my wrists, but I couldn't thrash; they were too tight. I was getting lightheaded.

Eventually, with gratitude to the other sedative they'd injected, I fell asleep. When I woke in the night, the restraints were gone.

The next morning I asked to see my records, which showed that the nurse had, in fact, injected me with Q.

So, when he made a brief appearance, I asked my doctor why the on-call had ignored my allergy.

—It's not accurate to call it an allergy, he said. It's more of a reaction.

—What the fuck, I said, are you talking about?

Every day afterward, whenever I passed by his door, my lover's roommate—an older man who became a confidant of mine, and who was always secretly undoing my lover's restraints after the nurses called crisis on him, which was almost every day—smiled with faint mischief, singing: 'These boots are made for walkin'...'

After two weeks I was let out. And two weeks after that, my relationship with Noel finally collapsed, caved from the pressure of

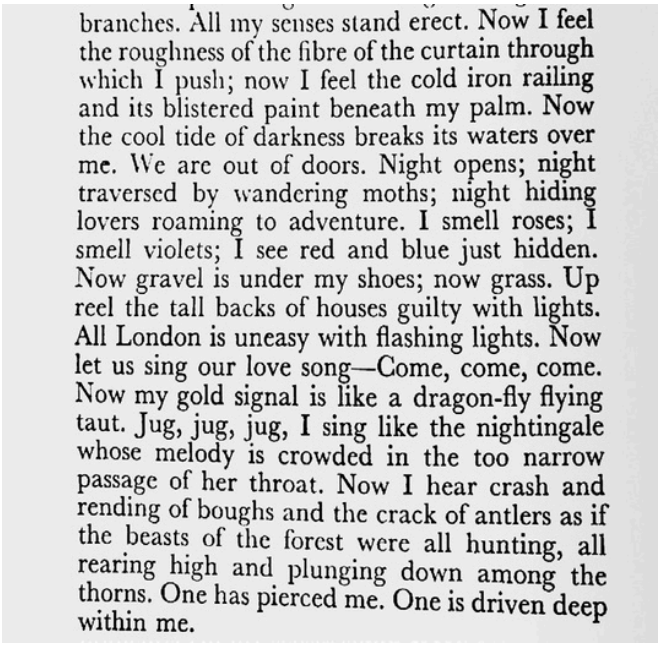
> our sweet shared nightmare. I will love them until my dying day. I will love them finally with the grandeur they demanded; the mythmaking I reserve only for those who break my heart.
>
> – AURORA, NOTES FROM BELLEVUE

I want to say that I feel, at last, like I can think. Or that I am thinking, at last, like I can feel; perhaps because I'm hidden in a copse of cypress trees with no audience other than vultures and strawberries, no longer distracted by men and women asking me to explain, to explain and reexplain the simplest facts about my fairy mind and its fairy desires, I am hearing the first sounds of a new song. 'Minimalism' is a luxury that belongs to people who can expect to be understood. There would be no need for rumination, for the double helix of dependent clauses which fairyshame irrepressibly encodes into any assertion, if I could assume my subtext were a universal truth: but the species of eyeless skulldwelling spirits whose echolocating astral howls sometimes scramble and restructure my inner monologues such that every thought, rather than performing a fearful recursion of the last, briefly assumes the flavor of a revelation as bright and unrecoverable as a blue star dissolving in a kaleidoscope's rainbow abyss, are fitful, unpredictable, certainly not universal, so unless I make myself extravagantly explicit, unless I ensure every atom of my vision is as rococo as a Fabergé egg, unless I trap my reader's precarious faith in sentences as labyrinthine as Escher's staircases, such that any attempt to disprove me results, inevitably, in vertigo, that is, unless I sublimate my confessions into a Gordian equation of symbols, who will believe in my outraged scrap of self?

> Strung on the loom of iron bars, her web was very simple and almost colorless, except for an occasional rainbow shiver when the spider scuttled out on it to put a thread right. But it drew the onlookers' eyes back and forth and steadily deeper, until they seemed to be looking down into great rifts in the world, black fissures that widened remorselessly and yet would not fall into pieces as long as Arachne's web held the world together...

Most every fairy I know is a so-called maximalist—what I simply call a passionate woman—because she fears each chance is her last chance to speak.

Well, enough prefacing. This thing here, what I'm calling a story, what I'm calling my best transcription of a messy euphony, syncopated and synchronized from a chaos of perfume commercials and goldleafed Byzantine icons of bleeding saints, from wistaria vines and my mother's smile and the fanning iridescence of seafoam, from the selfobliterative spirit of Simone Weil oscillating among the octaves of Aqua's Barbie Girl, from new millennium panic and Matrix sunglasses and seafoam unicorns rising, condensing from white-capped waves at the climax of The Last Unicorn, from Patti LaBelle and Dolly Parton percussing their acrylics in perfect harmony on television, from the twigs and threads of Emily Dickinson's arachnid handwriting and the born ruin of La Sagrada Família, from that cathedral's eternity of incompletion and from the immaculate wristflicks of Cristina La Veneno; from Sei Shonagon's lists of clouds, birds, flowering trees, things that fall from the sky, things that make the heart beat faster, things that appear distant though near and things that gain or lose by being painted, from Wu Zetian's invented words and Scheherazade's gambit and Penelope's loom, from Clarice Lispector's final interview and from a photograph of a page in The Waves, from Galadriel's gaze and the phrase "a rift in death's design," from a bubblegum trance mix called Ladies of the Lake (Staryu Edition) released in 2027



branches. All my senses stand erect. Now I feel the roughness of the fibre of the curtain through which I push; now I feel the cold iron railing and its blistered paint beneath my palm. Now the cool tide of darkness breaks its waters over me. We are out of doors. Night opens; night traversed by wandering moths; night hiding lovers roaming to adventure. I smell roses; I smell violets; I see red and blue just hidden. Now gravel is under my shoes; now grass. Up reel the tall backs of houses guilty with lights. All London is uneasy with flashing lights. Now let us sing our love song—Come, come, come. Now my gold signal is like a dragon-fly flying taut. Jug, jug, jug, I sing like the nightingale whose melody is crowded in the too narrow passage of her throat. Now I hear crash and rending of boughs and the crack of antlers as if the beasts of the forest were all hunting, all rearing high and plunging down among the thorns. One has pierced me. One is driven deep within me.

by Fleck of God under the pseudonym Sleeping Beauty a.k.a. Princess Aurora; from the aurora borealis I saw early one morning in 1997, rippling like an evaporated smoke of stained glass off the side of a highway in Northern Michigan; from Xu Bing's Sky Book, from the constellation of the wounds of Christ and from the epoch before their final extinction when dinosaurs witnessed earth's first flowers; from the birth of Venus and the death of Joan of Arc and the promise of the resurrection of some wooly mammoth from a thread of genetic code; from Daiyu burying fallen petals in Dream of the Red Chamber and drifty Rebeca overcome by the urge to eat dirt in One Hundred Years of Solitude; from cellophane by FKA twigs and claws by Charlie XCX played on infinite loop while I spelunk in the infinite mouth of a dead demigod nested by topaz tarantulas in sugarglass cocoons; from the clay diorama of a broken cathedral with freesiafeathered angels clambering like spiders up its sides while a waterfall woven from one thousand specks of Swarovski crystal spills motionlessly through a crack in the dome; from monetizing my pussy, weaving an archive of

pornography whose audience outpaces that of the photography my surgeon keeps of me; from a Venusian atmosphere spreading, deepening, licking my medical biography like a flame; licking and burning that archive of sterilized and taxonomic specimen dimensions—whatever this is, the point is that the surgeon is about to wake me up. I'm running out of time, baby.

So here's a sneak peek at the track list for our upcoming album, Unsex Me Here:

BLOD, SEMENE, & BEIS-WAXE

lyrics by Anna, from a recipe for lipstick scrawled on a tissue and found in a pocket of Elean'r's blue dress

'ACTUALLY JESUS WAS TRANS, G*OGLE IT'

lyrics by Rachel Rabbit White, from CHAMOMILE

@TRANSSENSUAL

lyrics from old Instagram captions, such as: "Some days you get knifed in the face, other days you get big tits. The knifing was—I was spilling my secrets all over the subway. In the end everything becomes the size of a gem. The gems are stuck up under my ribs. Iridescence is a kind of pulse.

Anyway, 😨😨😨

" and, below a photo of myself in a lace thong, injecting estrogen into my thigh: "Mr. Higginson, are you too deeply occupied to say whether my verse is alive?"

GET IN LOSER, WE'RE GOING 🐎 WOMAN

interlude of galloping. Hooves in the dust. No lyrics.

'BAROQUE NATURALITY'

lyrics inspired by Édouard Glissant, from Poetics of Relation: 'We call it baroque, because we know that confluences always partake of marginality, that classicisms partake of intolerance, and that, for us, the substitute for the

hidden violence of these intolerant exclusions is the manifest and integrating violence of contaminations.’

SWĒVENING(E

Old English: a song, a dream, or prophecy; sen a ~, to have a dream; cf. Chaucer’s translation of an obscure French troubadour’s tale of an amorous daydreamer who wanders into a walled garden, where he falls in love with a rose: ‘Many men sayn that in sweueninges / Ther nys but fables and lesynges.’ cf. Northern Passion, a polyphonic Medieval account of the Passion and Crucifixion: ‘...in hys sweuenynge... Alle that he sawe he vndyr stode...’

ADRIFT ON A BED OF HOLOGRAPHIC ORCHIDS

lyrics from Keeping Up with the Kardashians, ep. 165, Fake It ‘ Til You Make It: ‘You know, I'm obsessed with books right now,’ says Kris Jenner, stalking back and forth across her living room: ‘I'm reading a book about Le Courvoisier, which is an architect. It's so weird and boring, but I'm obsessed.’
‘No you're not,’ says Khloe.
‘And you're not reading that book.
‘I look at them.’
‘Right, you look at it. It's not a real book."
‘It has words, big words.’
‘Oh, this building was erected in nineteen-whatever?’
‘Yeah, it's his—it’s called History.’
‘That's a coffee table book.’

‘THE OVERTURNED ANGEL ANSWERED, PANTING...’

lyrics by Severo Sarduy, from Cobra

‘I’M OUT OF ESTROGEN AND I HAVE A GUN’

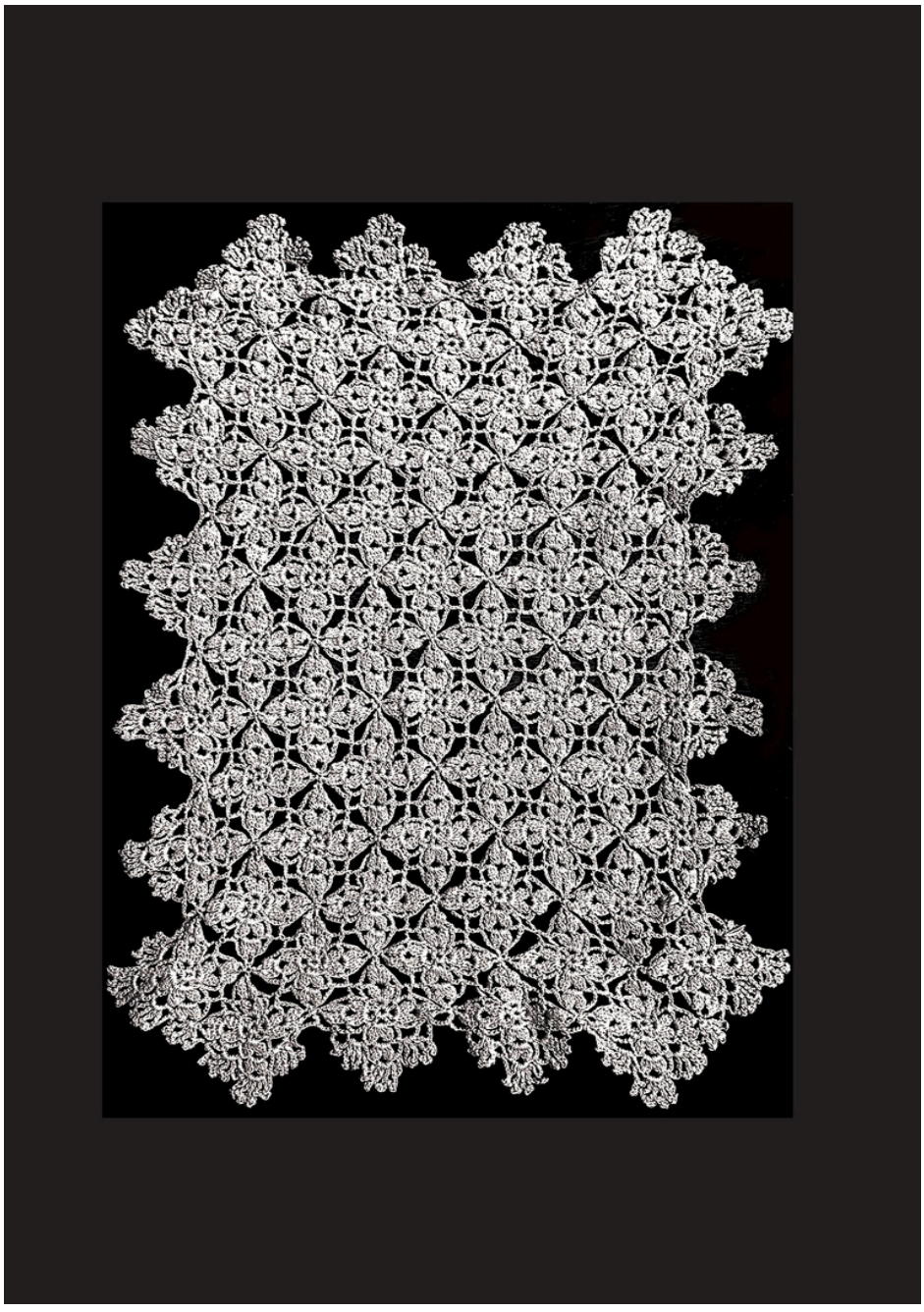
inspired by a bumper sticker on the back of a powderblue Ford-150

POLLINATE ME, BABY ;) lyrics from Bird's-nest ferns and moth orchids:

anEpiphyticManifesto for
cowgirls, and its sequel, Ask a Horse, Not anEndocrinologist by the Daughters of Aphroditos, an apocalyptic paradise-cult alchemizing estrogen in the clefts and folds of a cliff in West Texas.

'WE BUTTPLUGGED TODAY IN A HURRY'

lyrics from Ezekiel's texts to Aurora. Note (written by Aurora): my birthday is in a few days, on November 8th. I haven't paid rent yet this month, but I bought plane tickets & cashmere lashes, & next week I'm flying to Iowa to spend a week in Easy's bed. I drew the Four of Wands, reversed; I drew the Devil & the Wheel of Fortune. Dusk is falling in the garden of durations. It is getting so dark that I can scarcely go on writing. But whatever this is, it's still happening. I'm here. I'm about to strike a match.



Pod Map ⟐ SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project	
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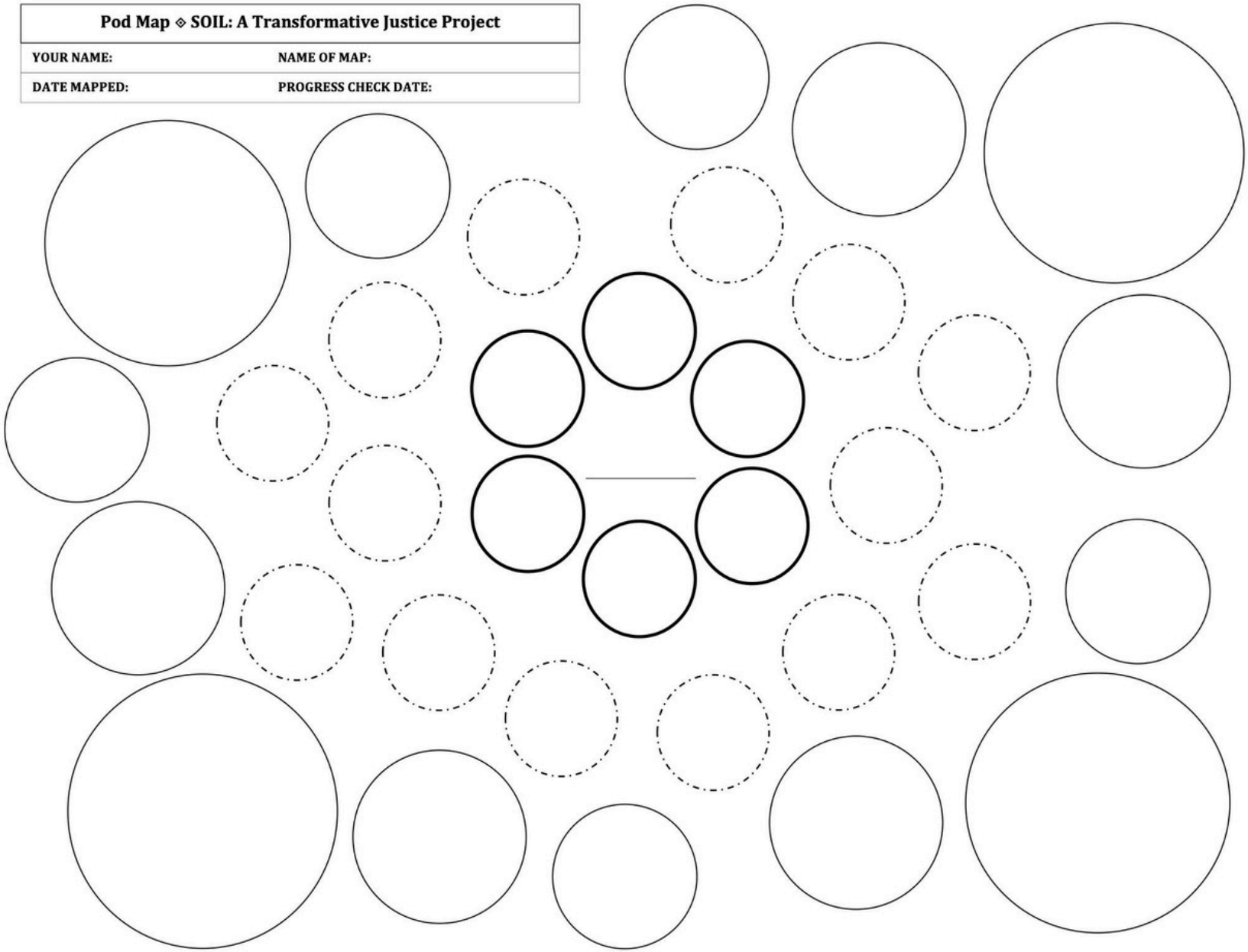

Skills & Needs Pod Map ⟐ SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project

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DATE MAPPED:	**PROGRESS CHECK DATE:**

Multiple Pods Map ⟐ SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project

YOUR NAME:	**NAME OF MAP:**
DATE MAPPED:	**PROGRESS CHECK DATE:**

Shared Pods Map ⟐ SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project

YOUR NAME:	NAME OF MAP:
DATE MAPPED:	PROGRESS CHECK DATE:

Transformative Justice Phrases for Hard Conversations

SOIL
A Transformative Justice Project

I never thought of it that way.

I appreciate you sharing your truth.

You're right.

This gives me a lot to think about thank you.

I'm curious, _____.

I appreciate your vulnerability.

Thank you for trusting me enough to share.

I don't know.

I feel scared that I will be _____.
(e.g. judged, not believed, mocked, blamed)

I'm sorry. That wasn't right.

I'm here and listening to whatever you'd like to share.

I made an assumption.

I care about what you have to say and how you feel.

I will work on that.

I understand if you do not trust me.

What I hear you saying is _____.
Did I get that right?

Is there feedback you have for me?

Are there things I could be doing better?

I reacted too fast.

The story I'm telling myself is_____.
The story I make up is _____.

That's fair.

I can see where you're coming from.

Is there more?

I want to sit with that before I respond.

I will try.

Sometimes it's hard for me to _____.

That makes sense.

I wish I had done things differently.

I should have _____.

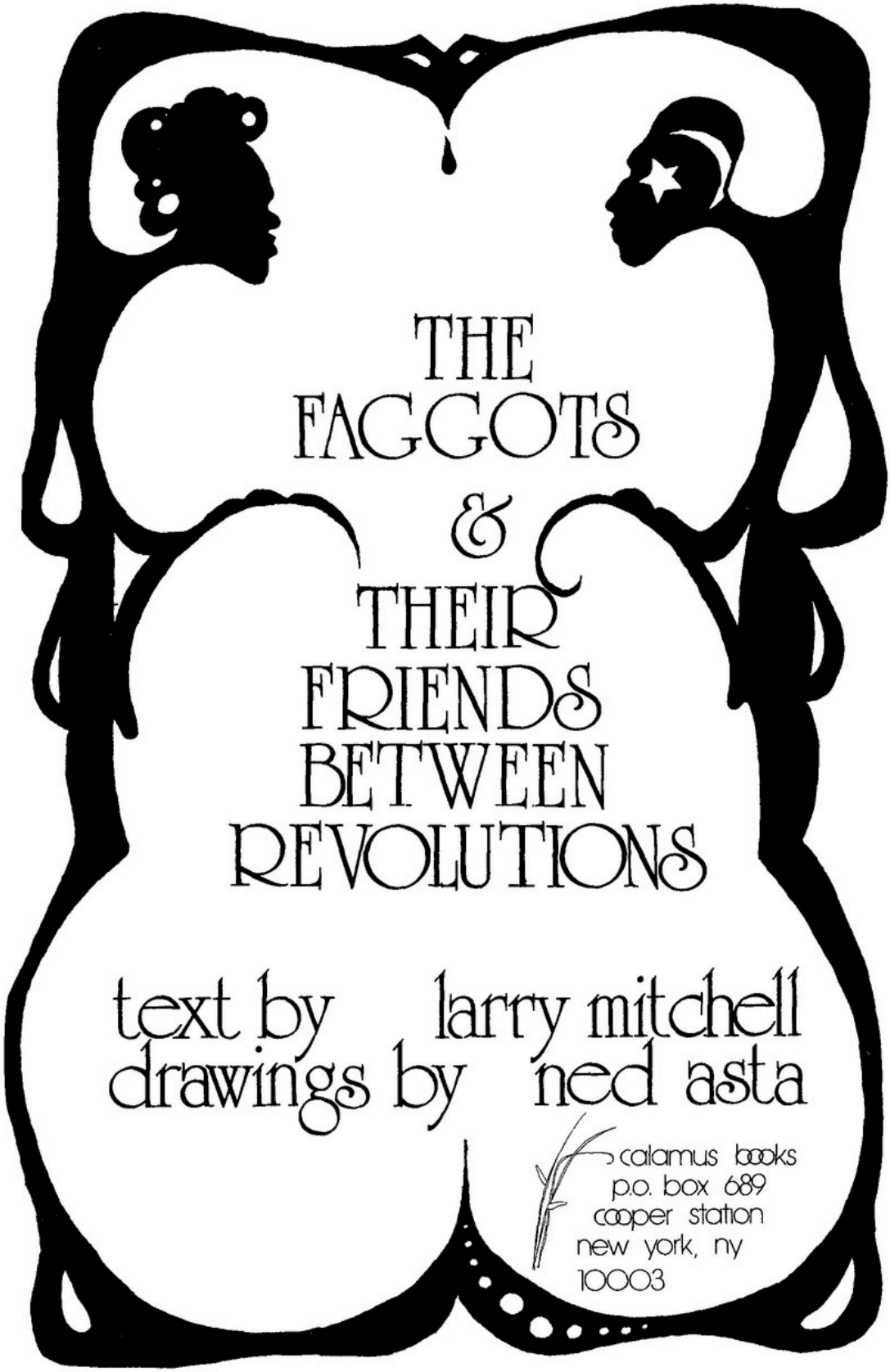
I can see how it came off that way.

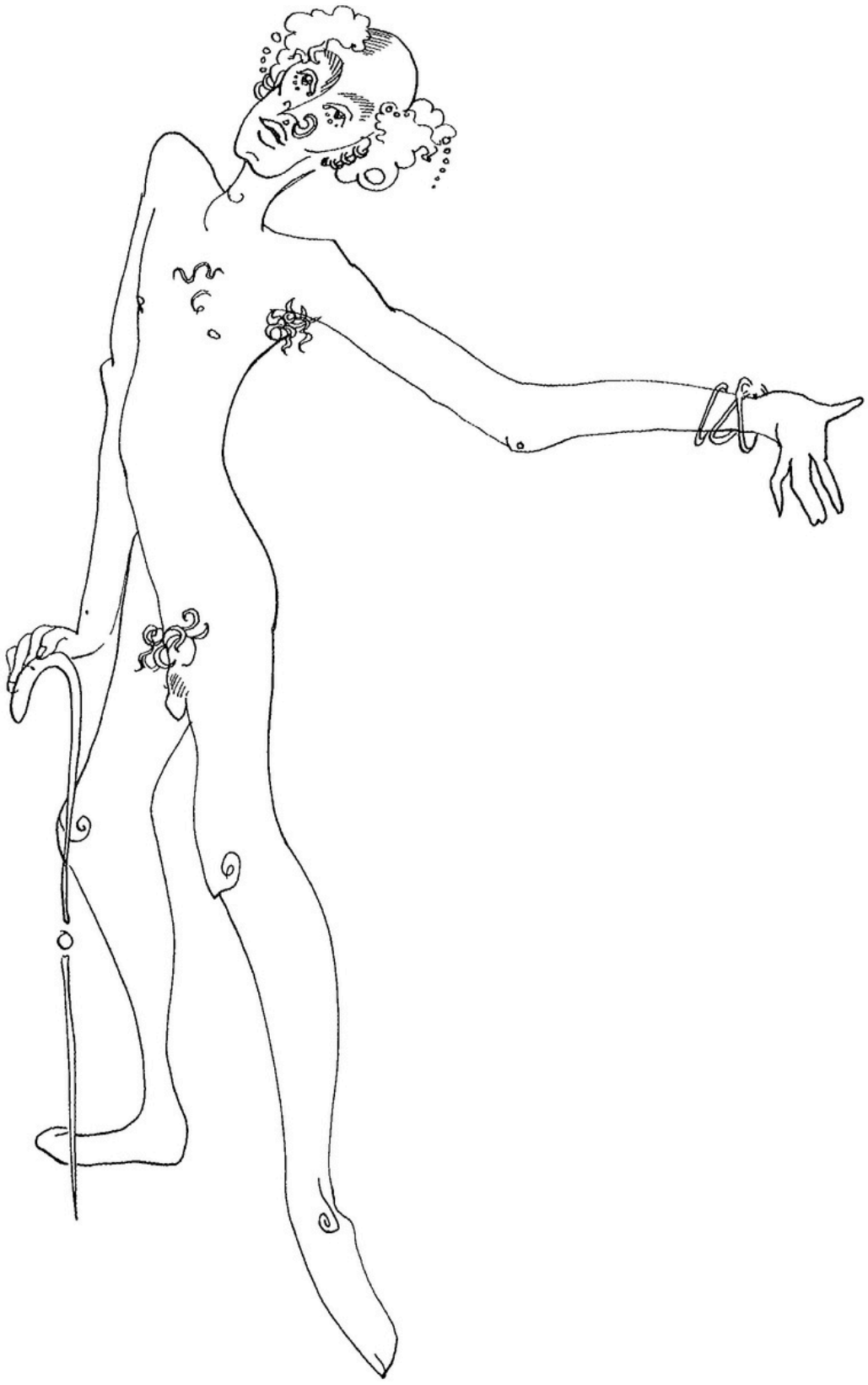
I was scared. I was hurt. I was ashamed.

Do you want me to listen or offer advice?

I want to make things right.

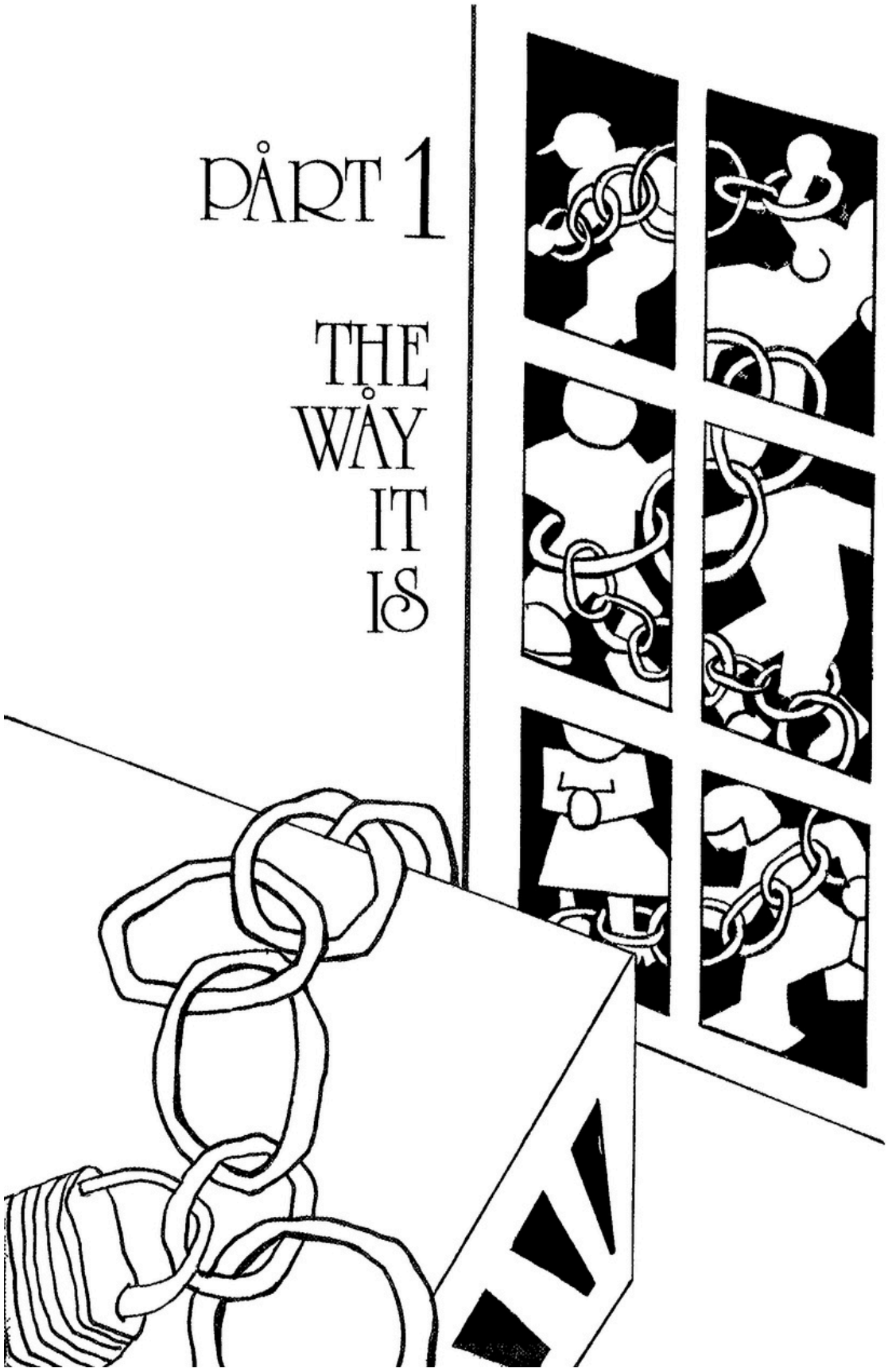
Created by Mia Mingus


THE
FAGGOTS
&
THEIR
FRIENDS
BETWEEN
REVOLUTIONS
text by larry mitchell
drawings by ned asta
calamus books
p.o. box 689
cooper station
new york, ny
10003

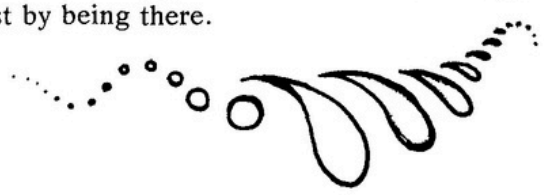


PART 1

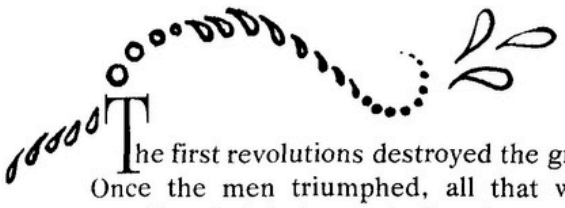
THE WAY IT IS



Let's drink to the old faggots who were there and helped make this happen just by being there.



It's been a long time since the last revolutions and the faggots and their friends are still not free.



The first revolutions destroyed the great cultures of the women. Once the men triumphed, all that was other from them was considered inferior and therefore worthy only of abuse and contempt and extinction. Stories told of these times are of heroic action and terrifying defeat and silent waiting. Stories told of these times make the faggots and their friends weep.

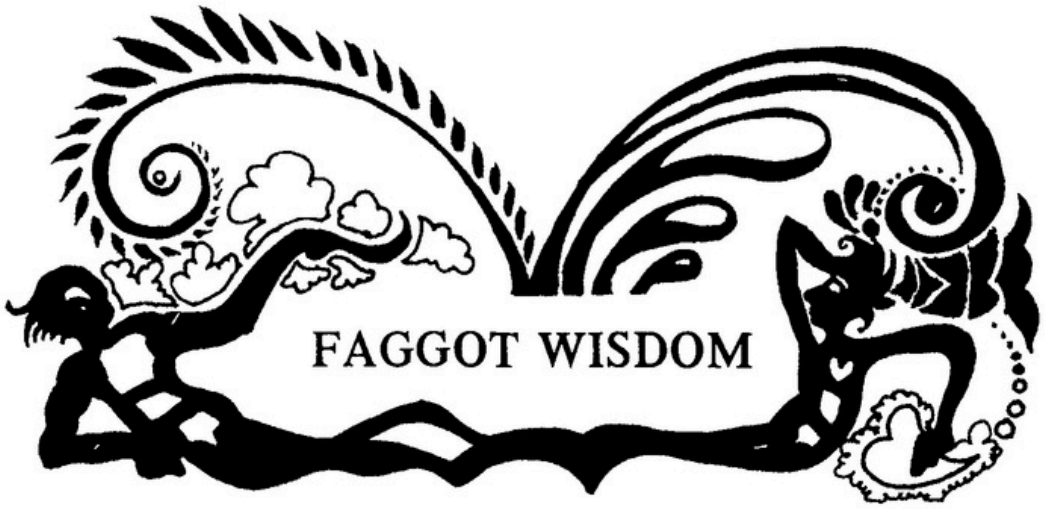
The second revolutions made many of the people less poor and a small group of men without color very rich. With craftiness and wit the faggots and their friends are able to live in this time, some in comfort and some in defiance. The men remain enchanted by plunder and destruction. The men are deceived easily and so the faggots and their friends have nearly enough to eat and more than enough time to think about what it means to be alive as the third revolutions are beginning.

The faggots and their friends now live in Ramrod. The leader of Ramrod is Warren-And-His-Fuckpole. He is the leader of Ramrod because he is the most paranoid and therefore the most vicious man in the land. Warren wants to know who the leader of the faggots is so he can rationalize with him. But the faggots have no leader. They have only dead heroes.

Ramrod is known to its neighbors for the fierceness of its weapons and the touchiness of its leaders. To support their violence, the rich men without color who own Ramrod send their tax collectors out to steal the people's work; they send their shifty-eyed ones out to sell the people machines which do not work and security which is not dependable; they send their thugs and goons out to take peacefulness away from the people. The more the rich men without color can steal from or take from or sell to the people, the more violence they can buy.

Ramrod is known to its neighbors for the elaborateness of its violence and its eagerness to use it.

2



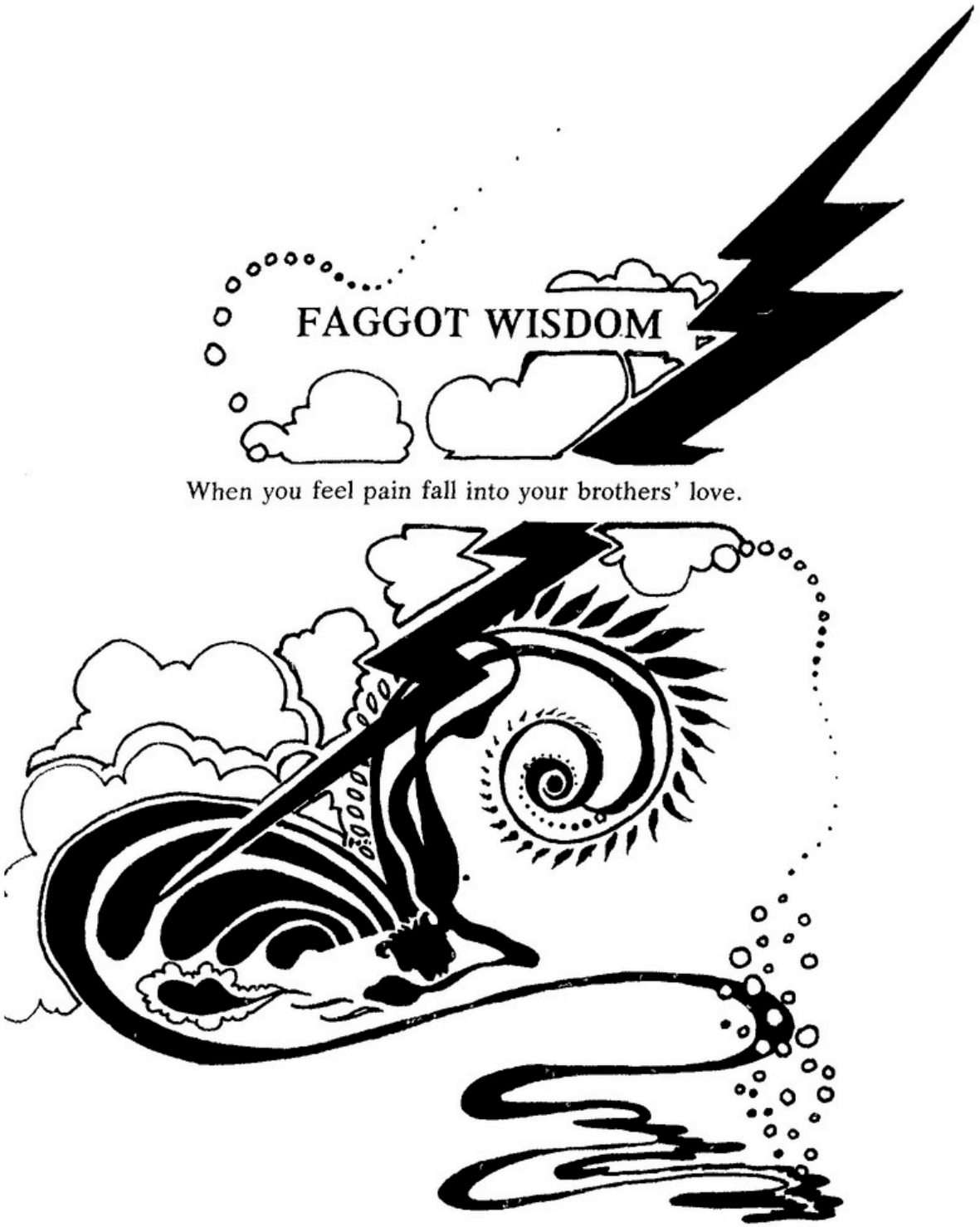
Romantic love, the last illusion, keeps us alive until the revolutions come.

THE FAGGOT VERSION

All the men could be faggots or their friends. They once were.

There still exists a faint memory of the past when the faggots and their friends were free. The memory lives in the faggots' bones. The memory appears at night when the bones are quietest. In darkness the faggots remember that once they lived in harmony with each other and their world. They adored the women who loved women and the women who loved women adored the faggots. Suddenly and strangely, some of the faggots began to show a dis-ease. First they cut down the trees which protected the other faggots from the wind and rain. Then they burned the earth which fed the other faggots. Then they killed the young animals and ate them themselves. Then they began to enslave the women—all the women. As the dis-ease advanced they stopped touching the other faggots and at that moment they became the men. They attacked the unsuspecting women who loved women. Bloodshed and devastation entered the bones of the faggots and began to drive the memory of harmony away. The women who love women and the faggots were the only ones who knew the cure for the men's dis-ease. But the men did not want to be cured. Their crimes against the others became more numerous and more demonic. More of the faggots became men and so more became implicated in self-loathing, a dis-ease of otherness. The men drove the healers away. And the healers went into invisibility to wait for the men to turn on each other.

At night in their invisibility the faggots remember freedom. They exchange the magical cock fluid and stroke each other's tired bones in memoriam and defiance.


FAGGOT WISDOM
When you feel pain fall into your brothers' love.

The faggots cultivate beauty and harmony and peace since these are states that the men do not know about. The lucky faggots live in the most beautiful places and make love in the most beautiful places and dance in the most beautiful places. Since the men are blind to beauty, they do not know that the lucky faggots live in the most beautiful places. And the lucky faggots do not tell them. Instead, they ask the unlucky faggots to come and join them.

The faggots consider it their sacred pleasure to engage in indiscriminate promiscuous sexuality. No faggot, regardless of age, race or physical appearance, should ever be horny. Horniness makes the faggots uneasy and nasty and distracts them from the revolutions. Sexuality, like all the necessities of life, must be free and easily available. So the faggots secure spaces where each can be anonymous, where all cocks are equal and all cock juice equally precious. "Feeding the faggots" they call it. Two rules govern these places of nourishment. First, all must remain quiet so the soft sexual noises can be heard. Second, anyone who is done must do. If you get, you have got to give.

The faggots cultivate the most obscure and outrageous parts of the past. They cultivate those past events which the men did not want to happen and which, once they did happen, they wanted to forget. These are the parts the faggots love the best. And they love them so much that they tell the old stories over and over and then they act them out and then, as the ultimate tribute, they allow their lives to re-create those obscure parts of the past. The pain of fallen women and the triumph of defeated women are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. The destruction of witty faggots and the militancy of beaten faggots are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. And so these parts of the past are never lost. They are imprinted in the bodies of the faggots where the men cannot go.

The men want everyone to remember and commemorate only their moments of victory and plentitude. The men hope that only they have such moments. So history becomes a chronicle of wars and brutality and state splendor. Art attempts to transform men's brutishness into men's benevolence. The faggots know better. They know that one man's victory means the defeat of others and that some men's plentitude means that others go hungry. The faggots refuse to celebrate the men's lies.

The faggots with the women cultivate the domestic arts. By now the public arts, under the control of the men for 2,000 years, have become too unpleasant for anyone else to practice with pleasure. All the former great public activities have been turned into games of chase and grab and hoard and expand and protect.

Occasionally, to remind themselves what the men have done, the faggots enact the ritual of the brutalization of the public arts. They sit in a circle. No one is allowed to smile. One faggot, with defiance in his face, removes his leather belt. Without words, he challenges another faggot. A brutal chase around the circle then begins. It ends when the faggot without the belt, bleeds. The sequence is repeated until each of the faggots has been, in turn, brutal and brutalized.

The faggots must live, so they take money from the men to appear to participate in public activitiy. They do commerce and education and governing. But their souls are not absorbed by these activities. The men's souls are absorbed along with their perceptions and their minds and their love. The men believe that the brutality of the public arts is reality. The faggots along with the women know better and so have turned their prodigious talents to the cultivation of the domestic arts and the domestic arts flourish.

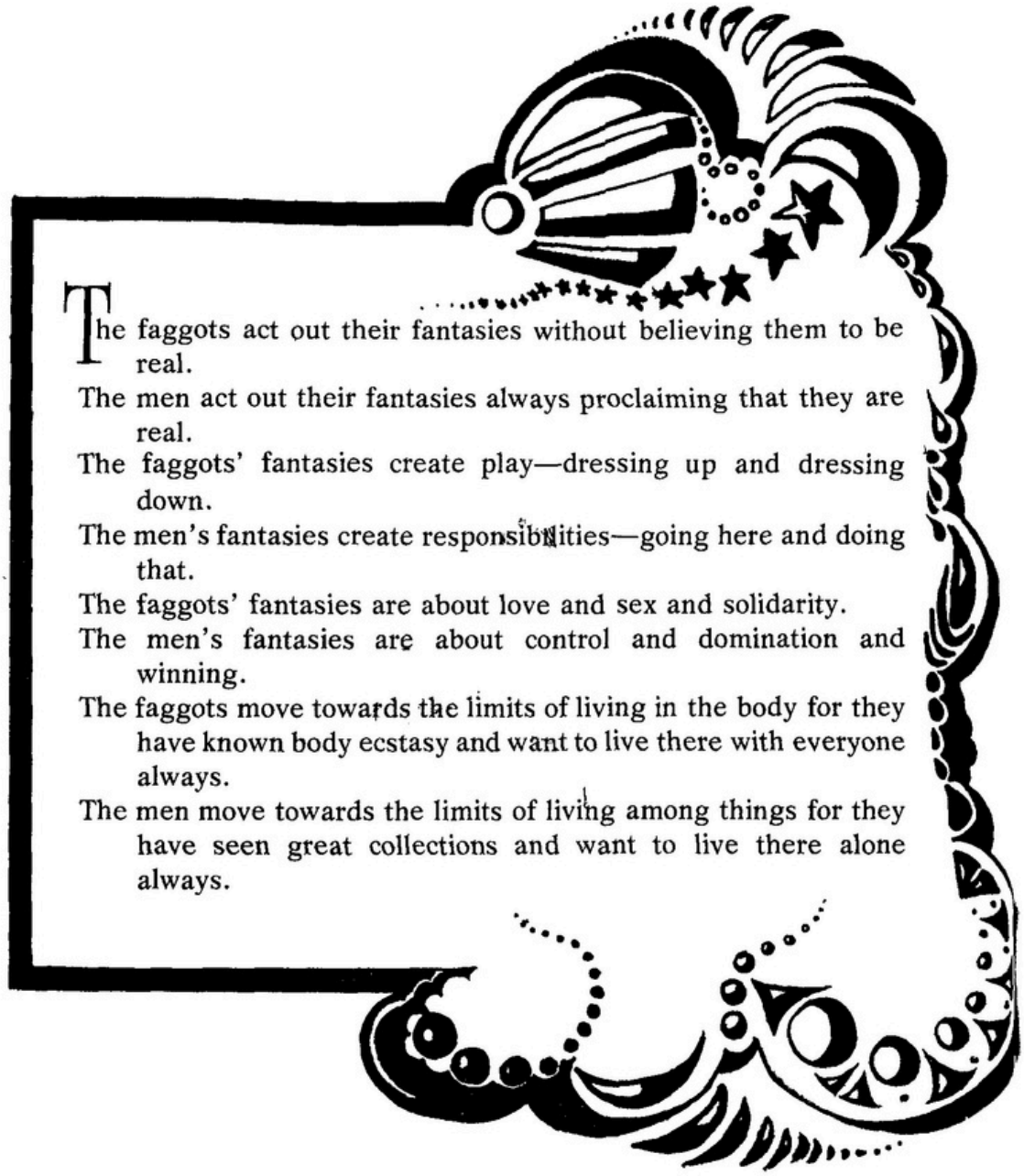
The faggots do not lust after power. The men feel secure only when they are distant from the people and making decisions for everyone. The men care less what they decide than that they alone can decide. The men never ask the people what they want. They decide what they want to decide. And then they force others to follow their orders. The men hoard power and use it coninuously to make sure that they still possess it. The men hoard power and use it brutally to demonstrate that they are the men.

The faggots sneer at all this power grubbing and seek love.

A FAGGOT FABLE

Some faggots were more beautiful than other faggots. The beautiful ones only wanted to touch and be touched by the other beautiful ones. Orchard was the most beautiful of all and all the beautiful faggots wanted to touch Orchard. One day Orchard made himself ugly, very ugly. When the beautiful faggots saw what he had done, they wept and then turned their backs on him and forgot him. Only the ugly faggots now wanted to touch Orchard. So he gathered them all together and took them to a mountain top where they lived in harmony and joy. As they learned to love each other more and more, Orchard and the other ugly faggots grew more and more beautiful. After many years they floated down from their mountain top into the town. The beautiful faggots were astounded by these newly arrived creatures. The beautiful faggots wanted to touch them all and love them forever. But Orchard said, "No, you are too ugly for us. Go and love the ugliest faggot you can discover and then we will love you in return." So they left the town and did as they were asked to do, spreading the notion that to love the ugliest will make both beautiful. At last, one day, all the faggots everywhere were so beautiful that no one had to think about it any more. Now they all loved and touched each other with great pleasure and ecstasy.

Some of the faggots are trashy. In fact, with the inspiration of the outcast women, the faggots developed "trashy" into a high form of disruptive behavior. When the men talk about the freedom of work and dirtiness of sex, the trashiest faggots move fast to the nearest public place where danger from the men is always present and proceed to spend endless amounts of time having glorious sexual pleasure. The men will do anything as long as they don't enjoy it or talk about it. The trashiest faggots love who they do and talk of it often.



The faggots act out their fantasies without believing them to be real.

The men act out their fantasies always proclaiming that they are real.

The faggots' fantasies create play—dressing up and dressing down.

The men's fantasies create responsibilities—going here and doing that.

The faggots' fantasies are about love and sex and solidarity.

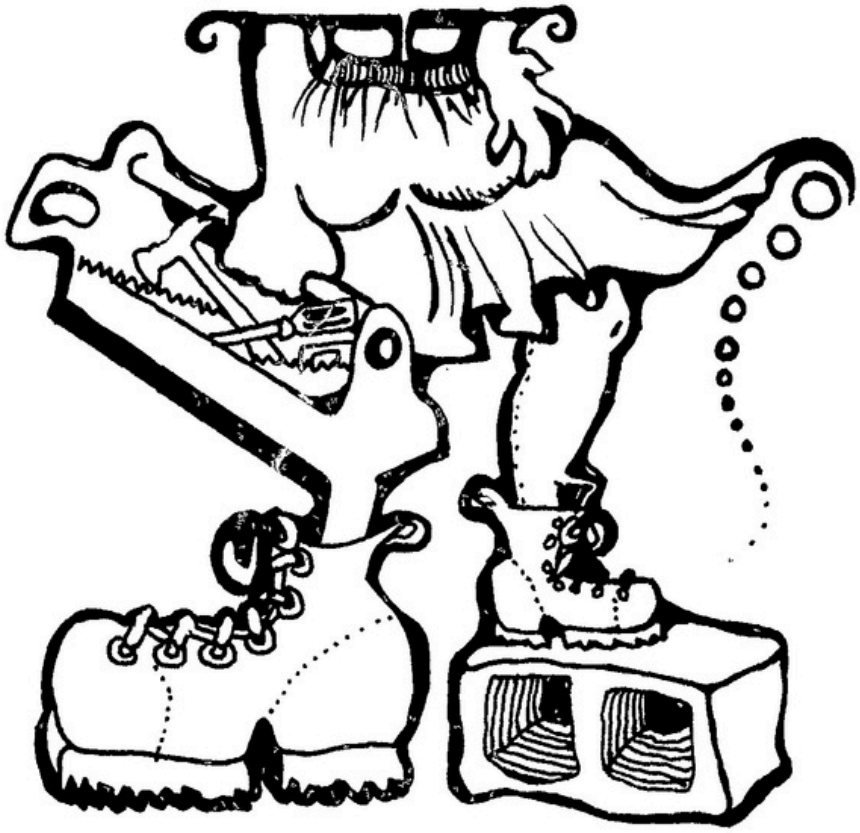
The men's fantasies are about control and domination and winning.

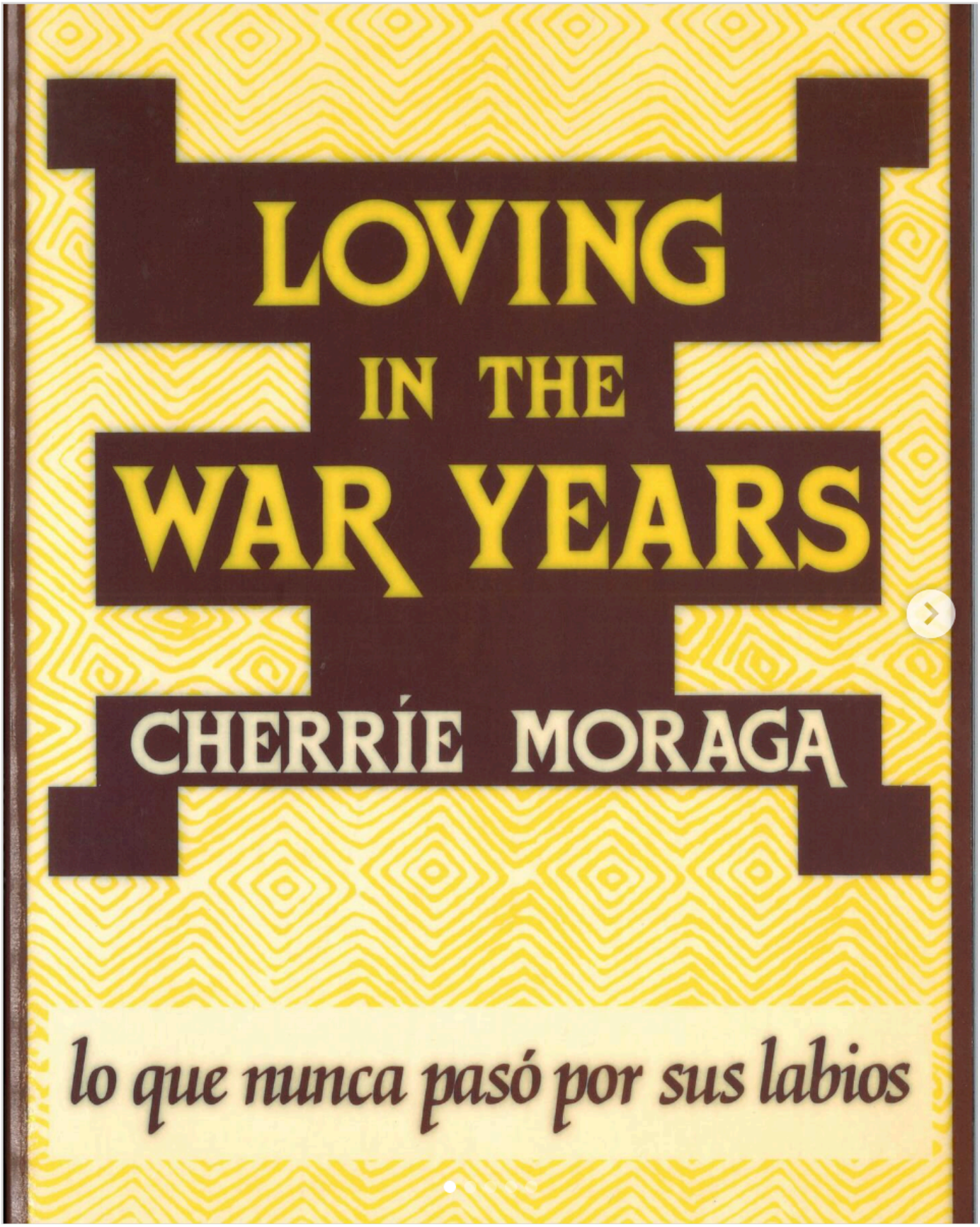
The faggots move towards the limits of living in the body for they have known body ecstasy and want to live there with everyone always.

The men move towards the limits of living among things for they have seen great collections and want to live there alone always.

FAGGOT WISDOM

There is more to be learned from wearing a dress for a day, than there is from wearing a suit for a lifetime.




LOVING
IN THE
WAR YEARS
CHERRÍE MORAGA
lo que nunca pasó por sus labios

LOVING IN THE WAR YEARS

Loving you is like living
in the war years.
I *do* think of Bogart & Bergman
not clear who's who
but still singin a long smoky
mood into the piano bar
drinks straight up
the last bottle in the house
while bombs split
outside, a broken
world.

A world war going on
but you and I still insisting
in each our own heads
still thinkin how
if I could only make some contact
with that woman across the keyboard
we size each other up
yes...

Loving you has this kind of desperation
to it, like do or die, I
having eyed you from the first
time you made the decision to move
from your stool
to live dangerously.

All on the hunch
that in our exchange of photos
of old girlfriends, names
of cities and memories
back in the states
the fronts we've manned
out here on the continent
all this on the hunch

that *this* time there'll be
no need for resistance.

Loving in the war years
calls for this kind of risking
without a home to call our own
I've got to take you as you come
to me, each time like a stranger
all over again. Not knowing
what deaths you saw today
I've got to take you
as you come, battle bruised
refusing our enemy, fear.

We're all we've got. You and I

maintaining
this war time morality
where being queer
and female is as rude
as we can get.

Introduction

Feeling Utopia

> A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth glancing at.
> —Oscar Wilde

QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.

That is the argument I make in *Cruising Utopia,* significantly influenced by the thinking and language of the German idealist tradition emanating from the work of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. An aspect of that line of thought is concretized in the critical philosophy associated with the Frankfurt School, most notably in the work of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse. Those three thinkers within the Marxist tradition have all grappled with the complexities of the utopian. Yet the voice and logic that most touches me, most animates my thinking, is that of the philosopher Ernst Bloch.

More loosely associated with the Frankfurt School than the aforementioned philosophers, Bloch's work was taken up by both liberation theology and the Parisian student movements of 1968. He was born in 1885 to an assimilated Jewish railway employee in Ludwigshafen, Germany. During World War II, Bloch fled Nazi Germany, eventually settling for a time in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After the war Bloch returned to East Germany, where his Marxian philosophy was seen as too revisionary. At the same time he was derided for his various defenses of Stalinism by left commentators throughout Europe and the United States. He participated in the intellectual circles of Georg Simmel and, later, Max Weber. His friendship and sometime rivalries with Adorno, Benjamin, and Georg Lukács are noted in European left intellectual history.[1] Bloch's political inconsistencies and style, which has been described as both elliptical and lyrical, have led Bloch to an odd and uneven reception. Using Bloch for a project that understands itself as part of queer critique is also a risky move because it has been rumored that Bloch did not hold very progressive opinions on issues of gender and sexuality.[2] These biographical facts are beside the point because I am using Bloch's theory not as orthodoxy but instead to create an opening in queer thought. I am using the occasion and example of Bloch's thought, along with that of Adorno, Marcuse, and other philosophers, as a portal to another mode of queer critique that deviates from dominant practices of thought existing within queer critique today. In my estimation a turn to a certain critical idealism can be an especially useful hermeneutic.

For some time now I have been working with Bloch's three-volume philosophical treatise *The Principle of Hope.*[3] In his exhaustive book Bloch considers an expanded idea of the utopian that surpasses Thomas More's formulation of utopias based in fantasy. *The Principle of Hope* offers an encyclopedic approach to the phenomenon of utopia. In that text he discusses all manner of utopia including, but not limited to, social, literary,

technological, medical, and geographic utopias. Bloch has had a shakier reception in the U.S. academy than have some of his friends and acquaintances—such as Benjamin. For me, Bloch's utility has much to do with the way he theorizes utopia. He makes a critical distinction between abstract utopias and concrete utopias, valuing abstract utopias only insofar as they pose a critique function that fuels a critical and potentially transformative political imagination.[4] Abstract utopias falter for Bloch because they are untethered from any historical consciousness. Concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential. In our everyday life abstract utopias are akin to banal optimism. (Recent calls for gay or queer optimism seem too close to elite homosexual evasion of politics.) Concrete utopias can also be daydream-like, but they are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many. Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope. In a 1961 lecture titled "Can Hope Be Disappointed?" Bloch describes different aspects of educated hope: "Not only hope's affect (with its pendant, fear) but even more so, hope's methodology (with its pendant, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy."[5] This idea of indeterminacy in both affect and methodology speaks to a critical process that is attuned to what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes as potentiality.[6] Hope along with its other, fear, are affective structures that can be described as anticipatory.

Cruising Utopia's first move is to describe a modality of queer utopianism that I locate within a historically specific nexus of cultural production before, around, and slightly after the Stonewall rebellion of 1969. A Blochian approach to aesthetic theory is invested in describing the anticipatory illumination of art, which can be characterized as the process of identifying certain properties that can be detected in representational practices helping us to see the not-yet-conscious.[7] This not-yet-conscious is knowable, to some extent, as a utopian feeling. When Bloch describes the anticipatory illumination of art, one can understand this illumination as a surplus of both affect and meaning within the aesthetic. I track utopian feelings throughout the work of that Stonewall period. I attempt to counteract the logic of the historical case study by following an associative mode of analysis that leaps between one historical site and the present. To that end my writing brings in my own personal experience as another way to ground historical queer sites with lived queer experience. My intention in this aspect of the writing is not simply to wax anecdotally but, instead,

to reach for other modes of associative argumentation and evidencing. Thus, when considering the work of a contemporary club performer such as Kevin Aviance, I engage a poem by Elizabeth Bishop and a personal recollection about movement and gender identity. When looking at Kevin McCarty's photographs of contemporary queer and punk bars, I consider accounts about pre-Stonewall gay bars in Ohio and my personal story about growing up queer and punk in suburban Miami. Most of this book is fixated on a cluster of sites in the New York City of the fifties and sixties that include the New York School of poetry, the Judson Memorial Church's dance theater, and Andy Warhol's Factory. *Cruising Utopia* looks to figures from those temporal maps that have been less attended to than O'Hara and Warhol have been. Yet it seems useful to open this book by briefly discussing moments in the work of both the poet and the pop artist for the purposes of illustrating the project's primary approach to the cultural and theoretical material it traverses. At the center of *Cruising Utopia* there is the idea of hope, which is both a critical affect and a methodology.

Bloch offers us hope as a hermeneutic, and from the point of view of political struggles today, such a critical optic is nothing short of necessary in order to combat the force of political pessimism. It is certainly difficult to argue for hope or critical utopianism at a moment when cultural analysis is dominated by an antiutopianism often functioning as a poor substitute for actual critical intervention. But before addressing the question of antiutopianism, it is worthwhile to sketch a portrait of a critical mode of hope that represents the concrete utopianism discussed here.

Jill Dolan offers her own partially Blochian-derived mode of performance studies critique in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*.[8] Dolan's admirable book focuses on live theater as a site for "finding hope." My approach to hope as a critical methodology can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision. I see my project as resonating alongside a group of recent texts that have strategically displaced the live object of performance. Some texts that represent this aspect of the performance studies project include Gavin Butt's excellent analysis of the queer performative force of gossip in the prewar New York art world,[9] Jennifer Doyle's powerful treatise on the formative and deforming force of "sex objects" in performance and visual studies,[10] and Fred Moten's beautiful *In the Break*, with its emphasis on providing a soaring description of the resistance of the object.[11] I invoke those three texts in an effort to locate my own analysis in relation to the larger interdisciplinary project of performance studies.

The modern world is a thing of wonder for Bloch, who considers astonishment to be an important philosophical mode of contemplation.[12] In a way, we can see this sense of astonishment in the work of both Warhol and O'Hara. Warhol was fond of making speech acts such as "wow" and "gee." Although this aspect of Warhol's performance of self is often described as an insincere performance of naiveté, I instead argue that it is a manifestation of the utopian feeling that is integral to much of Warhol's art, speech, and writing. O'Hara, as even his casual readers know, was irrepressibly upbeat. What if we think of these modes of being in the world—Warhol's liking of things, his "wows" and "gees," and O'Hara's poetry being saturated with feelings of fun and appreciation—as a mode of utopian feeling but also as hope's methodology? This methodology is manifest in what Bloch described as a form of "astonished contemplation."[13] Perhaps we can understand the campy fascination that both men had with celebrity as being akin to this sense of astonishment. Warhol's blue Liz Taylors or O'Hara's perfect tribute to another starlet, in the poem "Lana Turner Has Collapsed," offer, through glamour and astonishment, a kind of transport or a reprieve from what Bloch called the "darkness of the lived instant."[14] Astonishment helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place. Much of each artist's work performs this astonishment in the world. O'Hara is constantly astonished by the city. He celebrates the city's beauty and vastness, and in his work one often finds this sense of astonishment in quotidian things. O'Hara's poems display urban landscapes of astonishment. The quotidian object has this same affective charge in Warhol's visual work. Bloch theorized that one could detect wish-landscapes in painting and poetry.[15] Such landscapes extend into the territory of futurity.

Let us begin by considering Warhol's *Coke Bottle* alongside O'Hara's poem "Having a Coke with You":

> *Having a Coke with You*
> is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz,
> Bayonne
> or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona
> partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St.
> Sebastian
> partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for
> yoghurt
> partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches

partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and
statuary
it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as
still
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles

and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint
you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them
I look
at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the
world
except possibly for the *Polish Rider* occasionally and anyway it's in the
Frick
which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together
the first time
and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of
Futurism
just as at home I never think of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* or
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used
to wow me
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the
sun sank
or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as
carefully
as the horse
it seems they were all cheated of some marvellous experience
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you
about it[16]

This poem tells us of a quotidian act, having a Coke with somebody, that signifies a vast lifeworld of queer relationality, an encrypted sociality, and a utopian potentiality. The quotidian act of sharing a Coke, consuming a common commodity with a beloved with whom one shares secret smiles, trumps fantastic moments in the history of art. Though the poem is clearly about the present, it is a present that is now squarely the past and in its queer relationality promises a future. The fun of having a Coke is a mode

of exhilaration in which one views a restructured sociality. The poem tells us that mere beauty is insufficient for the aesthete speaker, which echoes Bloch's own aesthetic theories concerning the utopian function of art. If art's limit were beauty—according to Bloch—it is simply not enough.[17] The utopian function is enacted by a certain surplus in the work that promises a futurity, something that is not quite here. O'Hara first mentions being wowed by a high-art object before he describes being wowed by the lover with whom he shares a Coke. Here, through queer-aesthete art consumption and queer relationality the writer describes moments imbued with a feeling of forward-dawning futurity.

The anticipatory illumination of certain objects is a kind of potentiality that is open, indeterminate, like the affective contours of hope itself. This illumination seems to radiate from Warhol's own depiction of Coke bottles. Those silk screens, which I discuss in chapter 7, emphasize the product's stylish design line. Potentiality for Bloch is often located in the ornamental. The ornament can be seen as a proto-pop phenomenon. Bloch warns us that mechanical reproduction, at first glance, voids the ornamental. But he then suggests that the ornamental and the potentiality he associates with it cannot be seen as directly oppositional to technology or mass production.[18] The philosopher proposes the example of a modern bathroom as this age's exemplary site to see a utopian potentiality, the site where nonfunctionality and total functionality merge.[19] Part of what Warhol's study of the Coke bottle and other mass-produced objects helps one to see is this particular tension between functionality and nonfunctionality, the promise and potentiality of the ornament. In the *Philosophy of Andy Warhol* the artist muses on the radically democratic potentiality he detects in Coca-Cola.

> What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.[20]

This is the point where Warhol's particular version of the queer utopian impulse crosses over with O'Hara's. The Coke bottle is the everyday

Drawings, 1950s, *Still-Life* (*Flowers*), ballpoint ink on Manila paper, 16 3/4 x 13 7/8 in. (42.5 x 35.2 cm), Andy Warhol (artist), The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection, Contribution, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., © 2008 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, New York.

material that is represented in a different frame, laying bare its aesthetic dimension and the potentiality that it represents. In its everyday manifestation such an object would represent alienated production and consumption. But Warhol and O'Hara both detect something else in the object of a Coke bottle and in the act of drinking a Coke with someone. What we glean from Warhol's philosophy is the understanding that utopia exists in the quotidian. Both queer cultural workers are able to detect an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity.

Agamben's reading of Aristotle's *De Anima* makes the crucial point that the opposition between potentiality and actuality is a structuring binarism in Western metaphysics.[21] Unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense. Looking at a poem written in the 1960s, I see a certain potentiality, which at that point had not been fully manifested, a relational field where men could love each other outside the institutions of heterosexuality and share a world through the act of drinking a beverage with each other. Using Warhol's musing on Coca-Cola in tandem with O'Hara's words, I see the past and the potentiality imbued within an object, the ways it might represent a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening. Bloch would posit that such utopian feelings can and regularly will be disappointed.[22] They are nonetheless indispensable to the act of imaging transformation.

This fear of both hope and utopia, as affective structures and approaches to challenges within the social, has been prone to disappointment, making this critical approach difficult. As Bloch would insist, hope can be disappointed. But such disappointment needs to be risked if certain impasses are to be resisted. A certain affective reanimation needs to transpire if a disabling political pessimism is to be displaced. Another way of understanding Bloch's notion of hope is briefly to invoke the work of J. L. Austin. In *How to Do Things with Words* Austin displaces the true/false dichotomy that structures Western metaphysics with the much more conceptually supple distinction between the felicitous and infelicitous.[23] Austin's terms are derived from understanding the everyday speech act. Felicitous speech acts are linguistic articulations that *do* something as well as say something. But as Austin maps out the life of the felicitous speech act we see all the things that eventually go wrong and the failure or infelicity that is built into the speech act. Bloch's hope resonates with Austin's

1

Queerness as Horizon

Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism

for John

I BEGIN THIS chapter on futurity and a desire that is utopian by turning to a text from the past—more speci"cally, to those words that emanate from the spatiotemporal coordinate Bloch referred to as the no-longer-conscious, a term that a#empts to enact a more precise understanding of the work that the past does, what can be understood as the performative force of the past. A 1971 issue of the gay liberation journal *Gay Flames* included a manifesto by a group calling itself $ird World Gay Revolution. $e text, titled "What We Want, What We Believe," o%ered a detailed list of demands that included the abolition of capital punishment, the abolishment of institutional religion, and the end of the bourgeois family. $e entire list of sixteen demands culminated with a request that was especially radical and poignant when compared to the anemic political agenda that dominates contemporary LGBT politics in North America today.

> 16.) We want a new society—a revolutionary socialist society. We want liberation of humanity, free food, free shelter, free clothing, free transportation, free health care, free utilities, free education, free art for all. We want a society where the needs of the people come "rst.
> We believe that all people should share the labor and products of society, according to each one's needs and abilities, regardless of race, sex, age or sexual preferences. We believe the land, technology and the means of production belong to the people, and must be shared by the people collectively for the liberation of all.1

When we consider the extremely pragmatic agenda that organizes LGBT activism in North America today, the demand "we want a new society"

may seem naive by the present's standards. Many people would dismiss these demands as impractical or merely utopian. Yet I contend that there is great value in pulling these words from the no-longer-conscious to arm a critique of the present. $e use of "we" in this manifesto can be mistakenly read as the "we" implicit in the identity politics that emerged a&er the $ird World Gay Revolution group. Such a reading would miss the point. $is "we" does not speak to a merely identitarian logic but instead to a logic of futurity. $e "we" speaks to a "we" that is "not yet conscious," the future society that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment. $e "we" is not content to describe who the collective is but more nearly describes what the collective and the larger social order could be, what it should be. $e particularities that are listed—"race, sex, age or sexual preferences"—are not things in and of themselves that format this "we"; indeed the statement's "we" is "regardless" of these markers, which is not to say that it is beyond such distinctions or due to these di%erences but, instead, that it is *beside* them. $is is to say that the "eld of utopian possibility is one in which multiple forms of belonging in di%erence adhere to a belonging in collectivity.

Such multiple forms of belonging-in-di%erence and expansive critiques of social asymmetries are absent in the dominant LGBT leadership community and in many aspects of queer critique. One manifesto from today's movement that seems especially representative of the anemic, shortsighted, and retrograde politics of the present is "All Together Now (A Blueprint for the Movement),"2 a text wri#en by pro-gay-marriage lawyer Evan Wolfson that appeared on his website, freedomtomarry.org. Wolfson's single-minded text identi"es the social recognition and "nancial advantages o%ered by traditional marriage pacts as the key to what he calls "freedom." Freedom for Wolfson is mere inclusion in a corrupt and bankrupt social order. Wolfson cannot critique the larger ideological regime that represents marriage as something desirable, natural, and good. His assimilationist gay politics posits an "all" that is in fact a few: queers with enough access to capital to imagine a life integrated within North American capitalist culture. It goes almost without saying that the "all" invoked by the gay lawyer and his followers are normative citizen-subjects with a host of rights only a%orded to some (and not all) queer people. Arguments against gay marriage have been articulated with great acumen by Lisa Duggan and Richard Kim.3 But it is Wolfson's invocation of the term *!eedom* that is most unse#ling.

> Wolfson and his website's rhetoric degrade the concept of freedom. Homonormative cultural and political lobbyists such as Wolfson have

degraded the political and conceptual force of concepts such as freedom in the same way that the current political regime of the United States has degraded the term *liberation* in the case of recent Middle Eastern foreign policy. I invoke Wolfson here not so much as this chapter's problem or foil but merely as a recent symptom of the erosion of the gay and lesbian political imagination. Wolfson represents many homonormative interests leading the contemporary LGBT movement toward the goal of "naturalizing" the 'awed and toxic ideological formation known as marriage. $e aping of traditional straight relationality, especially marriage, for gays and lesbians announces itself as a pragmatic strategy when it is in fact a deeply ideological project that is hardly practical. In this way gay marriage's detractors are absolutely right: gay marriage is not natural—but then again, neither is marriage for any individual.

A similar but more nuanced form of what I am referring to as gay pragmatic thought can be seen in Biddy Martin's work, especially her psychoanalytically inspired diagnosis that queer critique su%ers from an androcentric bias in which queerness presents itself as the "extraordinary" while at the same time 'eeing the charge of being "ordinary." Being ordinary and being married are both antiutopian wishes, desires that automatically rein themselves in, never daring to see or imagine the not-yet-conscious. $is line of thought that I am identifying as pragmatic is taken from its vernacular register. I am not referring to the actual philosophical tradition of American pragmatism of Charles Peirce, William James, or John Dewey. But the current gay political strategy I am describing does share an interest in empiricism with that school. Gay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that I associate as endemic to a forward-dawning queerness that calls on a no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining a futurity.

$e not-quite-conscious is the realm of potentiality that must be called on, and insisted on, if we are ever to look beyond the pragmatic sphere of the here and now, the hollow nature of the present. $us, I wish to argue that queerness is not quite here; it is, in the language of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, a potentiality.4 Alain Badiou refers to that which follows the event as the thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined,5 and in my estimation queerness too should be understood to have a similar valence. But my turn to this notion of the not-quite-conscious is again indebted to Bloch and his massive three-volume text *"e Principle of Hope*.6 $at treatise, both a continuation and an ampli"cation of German idealist practices of thought, is a critical discourse—which is to say that it does not

avert or turn away from the present. Rather, it critiques an autonaturalizing temporality that we might call *straight time*. Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life.7 $e only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction. In *No Future*, Lee Edelman advises queers that the future is "kid stu%."8 Although I believe that there is a lot to like about Edelman's polemic—mostly its disdain for the culture of the child—I ultimately want to speak for a notion of queer futurity by turning to Bloch's critical notion of utopia.

It is equally polemical to argue that we are not quite queer yet, that queerness, what we will really know as queerness, does not yet exist. I suggest that holding queerness in a sort of ontologically humble state, under a conceptual grid in which we do not claim to always already know queerness in the world, potentially staves o% the ossifying e%ects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in contemporary popular culture.

A posterior glance at di%erent moments, objects, and spaces might offer us an anticipatory illumination of queerness. We cannot trust in the manifestations of what some people would call queerness in the present, especially as embodied in the pragmatic debates that dominate contemporary gay and lesbian politics. (Here, again, I most pointedly mean U.S. queers clamoring for their right to participate in the suspect institution of marriage and, maybe worse, to serve in the military.) None of this is to say that there are not avatars of a queer futurity, both in the past and the present, especially in sites of cultural production. What I am suggesting is that we gain a greater conceptual and theoretical leverage if we see queerness as something that is not yet here. In this sense it is useful to consider Edmund Husserl, phenomenology's founder, and his invitation to look to horizons of being.9 Indeed to access queer visuality we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now.

To critique an overarching "here and now" is not to turn one's face away from the everyday. Roland Barthes wrote that the mark of the utopian is the quotidian.10 Such an argument would stress that the utopian is an impulse that we see in everyday life. $is impulse is to be glimpsed as something that is extra to the everyday transaction of heteronormative capitalism. $is quotidian example of the utopian can be glimpsed in utopian bonds, a(liations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present

moment. Turning to the New York School of poetry, a moment that is one of the cultural touchstones for my research, we can consider a poem by James Schuyler that speaks of a hope and desire that is clearly utopian. $e poem, like most of Schuyler's body of work, is clearly rooted in an observation of the a%ective realm of the present. Yet there is an excess that the poet also conveys, a type of a%ective excess that presents the enabling force of a forward-dawning futurity that is queerness. In the poem "A photograph," published in 1974 in the collection *Hymn to Life*, a picture that resides on the speaker's desk sparks a recollection of domestic bliss.

A photograph
Shows you in a London
room; books, a painting,
your smile, a silky
tie, a suit. And more.
It looks so like you
and I see it every day
(here, on my desk)
which I don't you. Last
Friday was grand.
We went out, we came
back, we went wild. You
slept. Me too. $e pup
woke you and you dressed
and walked him. When
you le&, I was sleeping.
When I woke there was
just time to make the
train to a country dinner
and talk about ecstasy.
Which I think comes in
two sorts: that which you
Know "Now I am ecstatic"
Like my strange scream
last Friday night. And
another kind, that you
know only in retrospect:
"Why, that joy I felt
and didn't think about

when his feet were in
my lap, or when I looked
down and saw his slanty
eyes shut, that too was
ecstasy. Nor is there
necessarily a downer from
it." Do I believe in
the perfectibility of
man? Strangely enough,
(I've known un-
happiness enough) I
do. I mean it.
I really do believe
future generations can
live without the in-
tervals of anxious
fear we know between our
bouts and strolls of
ecstasy. $e struck ball
"nds the pocket. You
smile some years back
in London, I have
known ecstasy and calm:
haven't you too? Let's
try to understand, my
handsome friend who
wears his nose awry.11

$e speaker remembers the grandness of an unspectacular Friday in which he and his addressee slept in and then scrambled to catch a train to a dinner out in the country. He a#empts to explain the ecstasy he felt that night, indicating that one moment of ecstasy, a moment he identi"es as being marked both by self-consciousness and obliviousness, possesses a potentially transformative charge. He then considers another moment of ecstasy in retrospect, a looking back at a no-longer-conscious that provides an affective enclave in the present that staves o% the sense of "bad feelings" that mark the a%ective disjuncture of being queer in straight time.

$e moment in the poem of deeper introspection—beginning "Do I believe in / the perfectibility of /man?"—is an example of a utopian desire

inspired by queer relationality. Moments of queer relational bliss, what the poet names as ecstasies, are viewed as having the ability to rewrite a larger map of everyday life. When "future generations" are invoked, the poet is signaling a queerness to come, a way of being in the world that is glimpsed through reveries in a quotidian life that challenges the dominance of an affective world, a present, full of anxiousness and fear. $ese future generations are, like the "we" invoked in the manifesto by the $ird World Gay Revolution group, not an identitarian formulation but, instead, the invocation of a future collectivity, a queerness that registers as the illumination of a horizon of existence.

$e poem speaks of multiple temporalities and the a%ective mode known as ecstasy, which resonates alongside the work of Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time* Heidegger re'ects on the activity of timeliness and its relation to *ekstatisch* (ecstasy), signaling for Heidegger the ecstatic unity of temporality—Past, Present, and Future.12 $e ecstasy the speaker feels and remembers in "A photograph" is not consigned to one moment. It steps out from the past and remarks on the unity of an expansive version of temporality; hence, future generations are invoked. To know ecstasy in the way in which the poem's speaker does is to have a sense of timeliness's motion, to understand a temporal unity that is important to what I a#empt to describe as the time of queerness. Queerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time's "presentness" needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of a queer utopian hermeneutics. Queerness's ecstatic and horizonal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world.

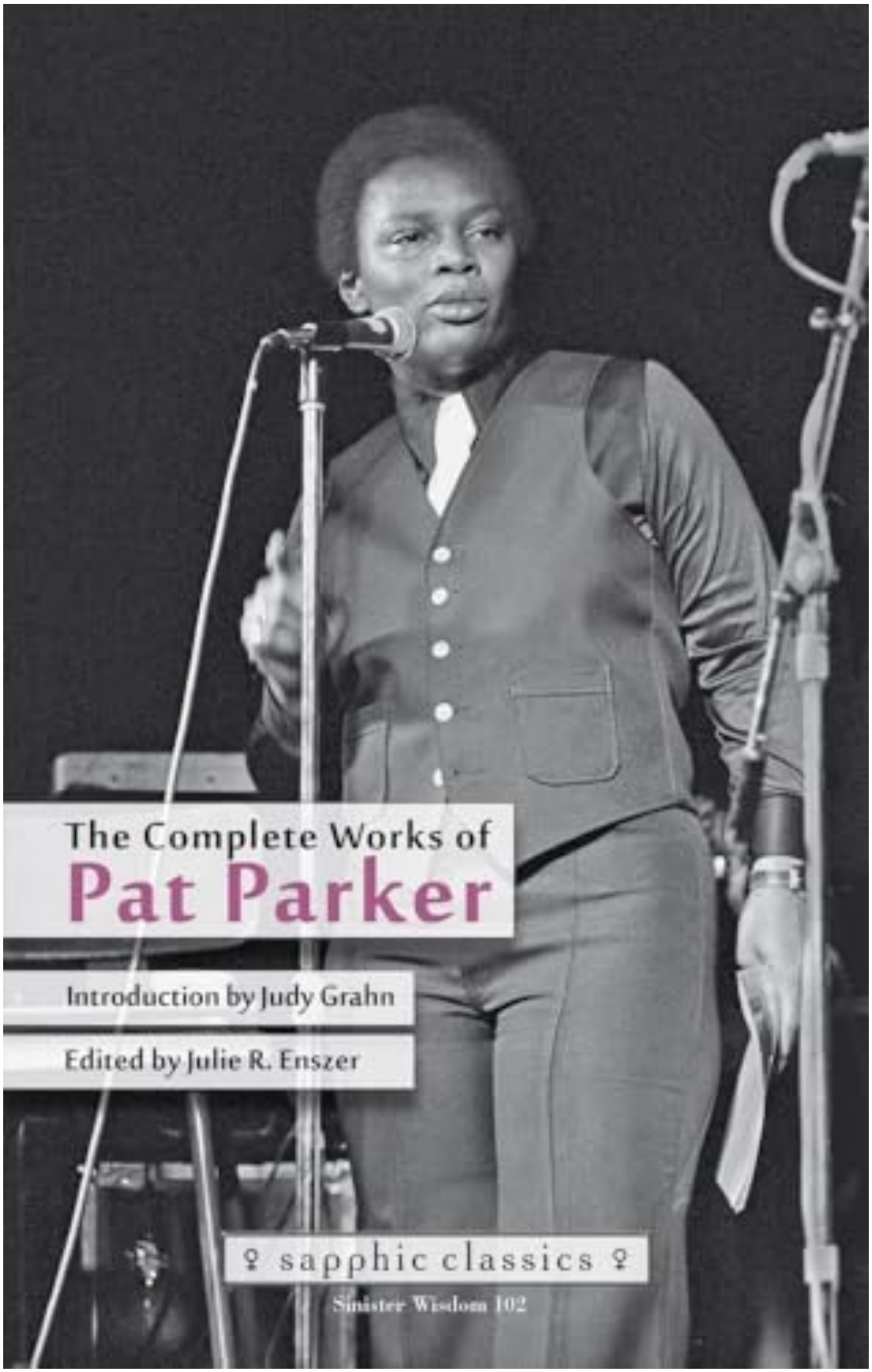
It would be di(cult to mistake Schuyler's poem for one of Frank O'Hara's upbeat reveries. O'Hara's optimism is a contagious happiness within the quotidian that I would also describe as having a utopian quality. Schuyler's poetry is not so much about optimism but instead about a hope that is distinctly utopian and distinctly queer. $e poem imagines another collective belonging, an enclave in the future where readers will not be beset with feelings of nervousness and fear. $ese feelings are the a%ective results of being outside of straight time. He writes from a depressive position, "(I've known un- / happiness enough)," but reaches beyond the a%ective force-"eld of the present.

Hope for Bloch is an essential characteristic of not only the utopian but also the human condition. $us, I talk about the human as a relatively stable category. But queerness in its utopian connotations promises a human

that is not yet here, thus disrupting any ossi"ed understanding of the human. $e point is to stave o% a gay and lesbian antiutopianism that is very much tainted with a polemics of the pragmatic rights discourse that in and of itself hamstrings not only politics but also desire. Queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. $is desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise. $e desire that propels Schuyler's "A photograph" is born of the no-longer-conscious, the rich resonance of remembrance, distinct pleasures felt in the past. And thus past pleasures stave o% the a%ective perils of the present while they enable a desire that is queer futurity's core.

Queerness is utopian, and there is something queer about the utopian. Fredric Jameson described the utopian as the oddball or the maniac.13 Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer. To participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity, a notion of futurity that functions as a historical materialist critique. In the two textual examples I have employed we see an overt utopianism that is explicit in the $ird World Gay Revolution manifesto, and what I am identifying as a *utopian impulse* is perceivable in Schuyler's poetry. One requires a utopian hermeneutic to see an already operative principle of hope that hums in the poet's work. $e other text, the manifesto, does another type of performative work; it *does* utopia.

To "read" the performative, along the lines of thought "rst inaugurated by J. L. Austin, is implicitly to critique the epistemological.14 Performativity and utopia both call into question what is epistemologically there and signal a highly ephemeral ontological "eld that can be characterized as a *doing in futurity*. $us, a manifesto is a call to a doing in and for the future. $e utopian impulse to be gleaned from the poem is a call for "doing" that is a becoming: the becoming of and for "future generations." $is rejection of the here and now, the ontologically static, is indeed, by the measure of homonormative codes, a maniacal and oddball endeavor. $e queer utopian project addressed here turns to the fringe of political and cultural production to o%set the tyranny of the homonormative. It is drawn to tastes, ideologies, and aesthetics that can only seem odd, strange, or indeed queer next to the muted striving of the practical and normalcy-desiring homosexual.


The Complete Works of
Pat Parker
Introduction by Judy Grahn
Edited by Julie R. Enszer
♀ sapphic classics ♀
Sinister Wisdom 102

For the white person who wants to know
how to be my friend.

The first thing you do is to forget that i'm Black.
Second, you must never forget that i'm Black.

You should be able to dig Aretha,
but don't play her every time i come over.
And if you decide to play Beethoven – don't tell me
his life story. They made us take music appreciation too.

Eat soul food if you like it, but don't expect me
to locate your restaurants
or cook it for you.

And if some Black person insults you,
mugs you, rapes your sister, rapes you,
rips your house or is just being an ass –
please, do not apologize to me
for wanting to do them bodily harm.
It makes me wonder if you're foolish.

And even if you really believe Blacks are better lovers than whites – don't tell me. I start thinking of charging stud fees.

In other words – if you really want to be my friend – *don't* make a labor of it. I'm lazy. Remember.

My Lover Is a Woman

Pat Parker

I.

my lover is a woman
& when i hold her
feel her warmth
    i feel good
    feel safe

then—i never think of
my family's voices
never hear my sisters say
bulldaggers, queers, funny
    come see us, but don't
    bring your friends
        it's ok with us,
        but don't tell mama
        it'd break her heart
never feel my father
turn in his grave
never hear my mother cry
Lord, what kind of child is this?

II.

my lover's hair is blonde
& when it rubs across my face
it feels soft
    feels like a thousand fingers
    touch my skin & hold me
        and i feel good

then—i never think of the little boy
who spat & called me nigger
never think of the policemen
who kicked my body & said crawl
never think of Black bodies
hanging in trees or filled
with bullet holes
never hear my sisters say
white folks hair stinks
don't trust any of them
never feel my father
turn in his grave
never hear my mother talk
of her backache after scrubbing floors
never hear her cry
Lord, what kind of child is this?

III.

my lover's eyes are blue
& when she looks at me
i float in a warm lake
    feel my muscles go weak with want
        feel good
        feel safe

then—i never think of the blue
eyes that have glared at me
moved three stools away from me
in a bar
never hear my sisters rage
of syphilitic Black men as
guinea pigs
    rage of sterilized children
        watch them just stop in an
        intersection to scare *the old*
        white bitch
never feel my father turn
in his grave
never remember my mother
teaching me the yes sirs & ma'ams
to keep me alive
never hear my mother cry
Lord, what kind of child is this?

IV.

& when we go to a gay bar
& my people shun me because i crossed
the line
& her people look to see what's
wrong with her
    what defect
    drove her to me

& when we walk the streets
of this city
    forget and touch
    or hold hands
        & the people
        stare, glare, frown, & taunt
            at those queers

i remember
    every word taught me
    every word said to me
    every deed done to me
        & then i hate
i look at my lover
& for an instant
    doubt

then—i hold her hand tighter

Metamorphosis-Pat Parker

You take these fingers

bid them soft–

a velvet touch

to your loins

You take these arms

bid them pliant

a warm cocoon

to shield you

You take this shell

bid it full

a sensual cup

to lay with you

You take this voice

bid it sing

an uncaged bird

to warble your praise

You take me, love

a sea skeleton

fill me with you

& i become

pregnant with love

give birth

to revolution

For Willyce

When i make love to you
i try
with each stroke of my tongue
to say i love you
to tease i love you
to hammer i love you
to melt i love you

& your sounds drift down
oh god!
oh jesus!
and i think -
here it is, some dude's
getting credit for what
a woman
has done,
again.

In English Lit.,

they told me
Kafka was good
because he created
the best nightmares ever-
I think I should
go find that professor
& ask why
we didn't study
the S.F. Police Dept.

Pat Parker

FOR THE STRAIGHT FOLKS WHO DON'T MIND GAYS BUT WISH THEY WEREN'T SO BLATANT

you know some people
got a lot of nerve.
sometimes, i don't believe
the things i see and hear.

Have you met the woman
who's shocked by 2 women kissing
& in the same breath,
tells you that she's pregnant?
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Or this straight couple
sits next to you in a movie
& you can't hear the dialogue
Cause of the sound effects.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

And the woman in your office
Spends your entire lunch hour
talking about her new bikini drawers
& how much her husband likes them.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Or the 'hip' chick in your class,
rattling a mile a minute –
while you're trying to get stoned
in the john
about the camping trip she took
with her musician boyfriend.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

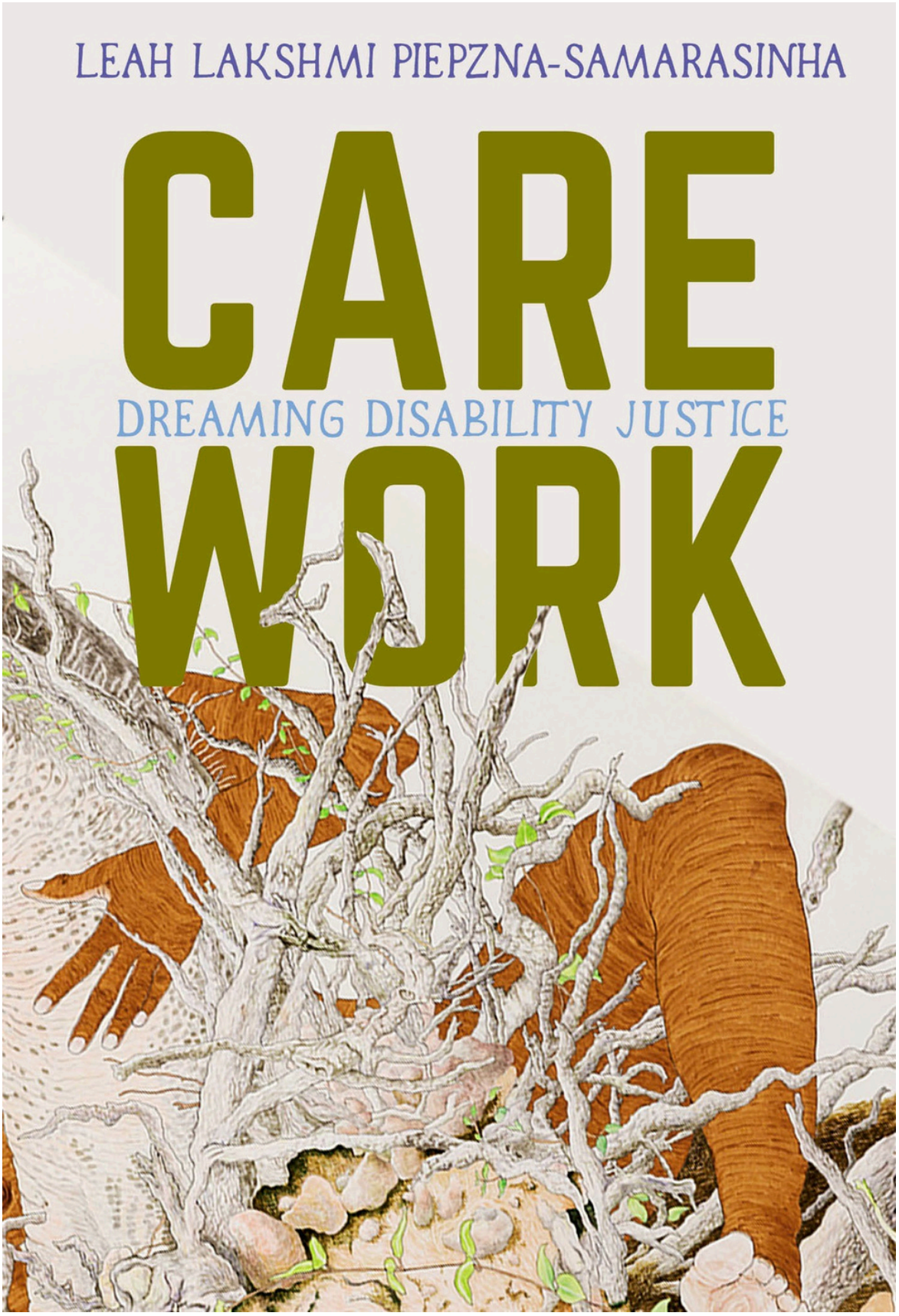
You go in a public bathroom
And all over the walls
there's John loves Mary,

Janice digs Richard,
Pepe loves Delores, etc. etc.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Or you go to an amusement park
& there's a tunnel of love
& pictures of straights
painted on the front
& grinning couples
coming in and out.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Fact is, blatant heterosexuals
are all over the place.
Supermarkets, movies, on your job,
in church, in books, on television
every day and night, every place –
even in gay bars.
& they want gay men & women
to go hide in the closets –

So to you straight folks
i say – Sure, i'll go
if you go too,
but i'm polite –
so – after you.


LEAH LAKSHMI PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA
CARE
DREAMING DISABILITY JUSTICE
WORK

CARE WEBS

EXPERIMENTSIN CREATING COLLECTIVE ACCESS

Do you have the car today? Hayati, I'm at the bus stop, I hurt so bad, can you pick me up? Hey can I borrow twenty dollars? Can you go buy groceries for me when you're out and drop them off Here's a list. Do you want to go to community acupuncture together? Hey, B. needs more car shifters, can you repost this Facebook note? Can we share the access van ride over to the city? I you come, you can say you're my personal care attendant and you won't have to pay. Do you hav anemone tincture[6] you could bring over? I'm flaring. Holding me would be good too. If I take you manual wheelchair and load it up with takeout, we'll all have food. Can you go with me to th clinic and take notes while I talk to my doctor? Can I use your address for the Easy Does I pickup?[7] I'm just over the border into Oakland. Let's pass the hat so we can afford ASL for th event. Do you have the interpreter list? Here's the list of accessible event spaces we made o Google docs. Can you be part of my mad map[8] crisis fam? Wanna Skype if you can't get out, eve if we live in the same city? Wanna go with me to the food stamp office? Can you pick up an eight for me when you go to the dispensary?

What does it mean to shift our ideas of access and care (whether it's disability, childcare, economic access, or many more) from an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that's maybe even deeply joyful?

What does it mean for our movements? Our communities/fam? Ourselves and our own lived experience of disability and chronic illness?

What does it mean to wrestle with these ideas of softness and strength, vulnerability, pride, asking for help, and not—all of which are so deeply raced and classed and gendered?

If collective access is revolutionary love without charity, how do we learn to love each other? How do we learn to do this love work of collective care that lifts us instead of abandons us, that grapples with all the deep ways in which care is complicated?

This is an essay about care—about the ways sick and disabled people attempt to get the care and support we need, on our own terms, with autonomy and dignity. It's specifically an essay about some experiments that have taken place over the past decade by sick and disabled predominantly Black and brown queer people to create networks of care by and for us. It's about our attempts to get what we need to love and live, interdependently, in the world and in our homes, without primarily relying on the state or, often, our biological families—the two sources disabled and sick people have most often been forced to rely on for care, sometimes, well, often, with abuse and lack of control. This is about some of the ways we are attempting to dream ways to access care deeply, in a way where we are in control, joyful, building community, loved, giving, and receiving, that doesn't burn anyone out or abuse or underpay anyone in the process. This is for us and by us, and it is also for everyone who thinks of themselves as able-bodied and normatively minded, who may not be, who will not always be, who the ghost of the need for care still dances with as deepest fate-worse-than-death fear, as what you want the most but can't even let yourself speak.

It is an essay full of sick and disabled QTBIPOC stories that are well known in certain activist

disabled QTBIPOC circles but at risk of disappearing or not being passed down, as the mediums where we find each other become less accessible/safe (Facebook in the age of Trump) or fade away (Web 2.0). And I am also thinking of care webs that have existed through time, that I know of through queer legend and myth, that do not often get counted as disabled stories and may not have thought of themselves as disabled care stories but still shared access tools, meds, and care— STAR House, the house started by Black and brown trans femme sex worker revolutionaries Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, with the rent paid by hustling and street sex work, as a safe space for trans people of color and street trans people to be free, be with each other, and share hormones and other supplies for healing and gender affirmation; the AIDS activist prisoner networks in the 1980s and '90s that shared safer sex supplies and AIDS drugs and fought for prisoners to receive medical care; the mad movement's underground safe houses and sharing of both pills and alternative treatments, as well as ways of coming off meds safely; the underground, often criminalized, harm-reduction networks like the New England Drug Users Union today where people share naloxone and fentanyl testing strips in their living rooms with folks who use opioids. We have found each other and offered healing and access to each other before and will again.

It is an essay full of questions. About what allows us to access care, as sick and disabled people who have been taught that our care needs are a pain in the ass and a burden—to the economy, the state, our families, the person we have to share the bus stop with so we need to take up as small a space as possible. It is an essay rooted in the stories I know, live, and witness, as a working-class, disabled femme of color—of all the ways our people have saved and continue to save each other against huge odds. It is an essay about the miracles that sick and disabled communities of color make for each other, and it's also about the contradictions and the cracks. Some of the questions are about what stops us from being able to ask for care when we come from Black and brown communities, for example, who have always been the ones forced to care for others for little or no money. Or about what happens when sick and disabled people are the only ones who do not forget about each other, but we all are extremely, extremely tired. I wrote this essay because I passionately believe in the power of our stories—of the revolution work we do when we cook a meal for each other, listen without judgment, share meds, hang out with each other during a psychotic break, or lift each other onto a toilet or a scooter.

I wrote this essay because I passionately believe in recording sick and disabled QTBIPOC stories, and because I believe the stories I have witnessed and participated in over the past decade of building ways of creating care are both a core part of disability justice work and the work of making the next world, the world we want, the post-Trump, post-fascist, postapocalyptic world. I wrote this because I believe we stand at the crossroads, between both the gifts and the unexpected, inevitable collapses of our work, and we have the opportunity to dream and keep dreaming ways to build emergent, resilient care webs. I believe that our work in creating the new world depends on it—because all of us will become disabled and sick, because state systems are failing, yet "community" is not a magic unicorn, a one-stop shop that always helps us do the laundry and be held in need. I believe that the only way we will do this is by being fucking real, by not papering over the places where our rhetoric falls flat, where we ran out of steam, or where this shit is genuinely fucking hard.

I wrote this for my mother, a working-class survivor of severe childhood sexual and physical abuse, a disabled Irish and Roma woman living with post-polio syndrome and no medical care, and then cancer spawned by environmental racism, as well as DID and complex PTSD, who was rarely if ever able to access any form of care or support for her disabilities, who both neglected me medically and shielded me from institutionalization as a young disabled and neurodivergent person, who did the absolute best and most common thing she could do as a working-class survivor who trusted no system and few people. I wrote this for my younger self, a newly incredibly sick, isolated twenty-two-year-old, who made up ways to care for my disabilities in isolation from disability community, from books, prayers, guessing, and dreams. I wrote this for everyone who has been denied SSI, SSDI, ODSP, or whatever they call state disability money where you live, or "official" disability accommodations for the first or fourth time, who can't get that "medical proof" of our sickness or disability and who thus can't get anything the state begrudgingly offers us—that discounted transit, Access-A-Ride, state or federal disability benefits, welfare, accommodations at school or work. This is for those of us who are closeting our disability to keep everything from health insurance and jobs to social acceptance and capital—all of which we need to survive.

This is for those of us who cannot closet our disability, Madness, Deafness, and illness-whose witnessable disability is just a fact of life that becomes a bullet target for violence, fo attempts by police, doctors, and families to murder us and lock us up. This is for all of u evading that capture and control, that being disposed of—who still have need. This is fo everyone Black and brown who freeze, who feel we could never, ever think about askin someone to do our dishes or clean our toilet or help us dress, because that is the work we o our families have done for little or no money during enslavement, colonial invasior immigration, and racist poverty—and this is for those of us who have both cleaned toilets an wiped asses for little or no pay and respect and who too need and deserve care with respec and dignity. This is for all of us, especially Black, Indigenous, and brown femme people, wh have kept our communities alive after being both abandoned and policed by the state, and i the face of medical experimentation and denial of health insurance.

This is for all the friends I know who have needed care but also needed to evade Children's Ai and foster care. This is for everyone who desperately needs care but will never let a care worke in their house for fear they or their children will be taken away by the state. This is for everyon who has had to run away from accepting care because care meant control—by family members o partners or workers or strangers. This is for every group of stressed-out QTBIPOC friends wh are the only three disabled people you know, who are doing all the care for each other until i trails away into frustration, stress, yelling, and breakdowns. This is for those of us who hav been forgotten and left behind by our communities, who have and have not survived tha abandonment and isolation. This is for everyone trying to keep themselves or their friend out o the psych ward, who sometimes want more than anything for some actual professional wh wouldn't be messed up and who would actually help. This is for all the times I've relaxed into th miracle of being cared for well, that changed my understanding of what was possible, and ever time I've succeeded and failed at caring well. This is for the road we make by moving forwarc the dream future of autonomous care we deserve.

HOW PEOPLE GET CARE (AND DON'T) AND WHAT CARE MEANS

I'm not an academically trained disability scholar, and I'm not going to pretend that this next section fits (white-dominated) disability studies academic standards. The history of disabled people accessing or being denied care and the ways our needs have been policed and profited off of is vast, and there is no way I can do it justice in one essay—but I wanted to offer a very brief history of how care has and has not been offered to us in North America pre- and post-colonialism. (I am also aware of how so much writing about disability is limited to a white-dominated disability studies field and language, and how inaccessible that is to the vast majority of sick and disabled people who could potentially use it—so there are pros and cons to both approaches.) But here goes: There have been a million ways sick and disabled people have accessed the care we need over the centuries, and I don't have time to go over them. A light once- over will say that in many precolonial contact communities, there existed ways of being disabled that did not mean stigma, shame, exile, or death. Disabled Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill has remarked that in precontact Cherokee, there are many words for people with different kinds of bodies, illnesses, and what would be seen as impairments; none of those words are negative or view those sick or disabled people as defective or not as good as normatively bodied people.9

With the arrival of white settler colonialism, things changed, and not in a good way. For many sick and disabled Black, Indigenous, and brown people under transatlantic enslavement, colonial invasion, and forced labor, there was no such thing as state-funded care. Instead, if we were too sick or disabled to work, we were often killed, sold, or left to die, because we were not making factory or plantation owners money. Sick, disabled, Mad, Deaf, and neurodivergent people's care and treatment varied according to our race, class, gender, and location, but for the most part, at best, we were able to evade capture and find ways of caring for ourselves or being cared for by our families, nations, or communities—from our Black and brown communities to disabled communities. At worst, a combination of legal and societal ableism plus racism and colonialism meant that we were locked up in institutions or hospitals, "for our own good." The Ugly Laws, on the books in the United States from the mid-1700s to the 1970s, stated that many disabled people were "too ugly" to be in public and legally prevented disabled people from being able to take up space in public. The Ugly Laws were interwoven with a mass creation in the 1800s and onward of hospitals, "homes," "sanitoriums," and "charitable institutions" where it was the norm for disabled, sick, mad, and Deaf people to be sequestered from able-bodied "normal society."10

These institutions overlapped with other prison/carceral systems, like residential schools, where Indigenous children were stolen, abused, and stripped of their language and culture, and prisons where Black, brown, poor, criminalized, trans, queer, and sex working people were locked up for profit. People's fear of accessing care didn't come out of nowhere. It came out of generations and centuries where needed care meant being locked up, losing your human and civil rights, and being subject to abuse. The specter of "the home" and lockup still haunts everyone when we consider asking for or needing care.

One of the first and most passionate demands of the disability rights and mental patients liberation movements of the 1960s and '70s was for independent living and deinstitutionalization It's an often-told crip story—how the disability rights movement started with the Rolling Quads the white, polio-surviving, physically disabled men who got radicalized while attending UC Berkeley by both witnessing Black and brown power and free speech movements and being sequestered in each other's company because they were only allowed to live in the campus

infirmary. How after graduation, they started the first independent living centers and pushed fo Medicare and Medicaid to pay for state-funded personal care attendants to allow them to live ir their own apartments and get help with dressing, using the bathroom, and transferring from bec to chair.

Yet some/many of us live in the "cliffhangers," as Patty Berne puts it, of the disability rights movement—the spaces where a white-dominated, single-issue, civil rights approach that depends on the ability to use lawsuits to achieve disability liberation leaves many of us behind. Some of us are disabled folks who are able to access care attendants to help us live that are paid for by the state, Department of Health, or Social Services. Some of us are disabled people whose disability the state never approves of—so it's not "real." Some of us fear that letting anyone in to care for us will mean we are declared incompetent and lose our civil rights, so we guard the houses where we can be sick. Some of us know that accepting care means accepting queerphobia, transphobia fatphobia or sexphobia from our care attendants. Some of us are in the in-between of needing some care but not fitting into the state model of either Total and Permanent Disability or fit and ready to work—so we can't access the services that are there. Many of us are familiar with being genuinely sick as hell and needing some help but failing the official crip exams because we can still cook, shop, and work, only slowly and when there is no other choice. Some of us are not citizens. Some of us make twenty bucks too much. Some of us will lose our right to marry if we go on state disability, or our access to work or housing. Some of us belong to Nations that will not accept state money. Some of us—always, and especially post-Trump, with the rise of fascism calling for the end of Medicaid, the ACA, and the ADA in the US, and socialized medicine and human rights legislation throughout the world—are continuously worrying about what happens when our precarious right to state-funded care goes away, and what our survival strategies will be then.

MOVING PAST NIGHTMARE TOWARDS STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE OF COLLECTIVE ACCESS

In the face of systems that want us dead, sick and disabled people have been finding ways to care for ourselves and each other for a long time. As Vancouver's Radical Access Mapping Project[11] says, "Able-bodied people: if you don't know how to do access, ask disabled people. We've been doing it for a long time, usually on no money, and we're really good at it." Sometimes we call them care webs or collectives, sometimes we call them "my friend that helps me out sometimes," sometimes we don't call them anything at all—care webs are just life, just what you do.

The care webs I write about here break from the model of paid attendant care as the only way to access disability support. Resisting the model of charity and gratitude, they are controlled by the needs and desires of the disabled people running them. Some of them rely on a mix of abled and disabled people to help; some of them are experiments in "crip-made access"—access made by and for disabled people only, turning on its head the model that disabled people can only passively receive care, not give it or determine what kind of care we want. Whether they are disabled only or involve disabled and non-disabled folks, they still work from a model of solidarity not charity—of showing up for each other in mutual aid and respect.

I first learned of the term "mutual aid" as an anarchist teenager, in books like Ursula Le Guin's The Dispossessed and in a lot of zines that quoted white guy theorists like Kropotkin. All of these writers, and many other anarchist and antiauthoritarian writers, use the term to mean a voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit. Mutual aid, as opposed to charity, does not connote moral superiority of the giver over the receiver. White people didn't invent the concept of mutual aid—many precolonial (and after) Black, Indigenous, and brown communities have complex webs of exchanges of care. However, given the presence of white anarchism as one of the biggest places that talk about ideas of mutual aid, it doesn't surprise me that one of the first examples of collective care I encountered was dreamed up by a white Southern disabled queer femme anarchist whose politics brought together disability and mutual aid.

THE PREQUEL: LOREE ERICKSON'S CARE COLLECTIVE

Hello Lovely People ... For those of you who don't know me I am Loree Erickson, a queer femmegimp porn star academic who now lives in Toronto, ON but grew up in Leesburg, VA and lived in Richmond for 8 years. My work tends to focus on the intersections of radical queer, disability and sex/uality bringing together personal experience, creativity (through video and photography), and theory to explore issues of explicit sexual representation, embodiment, and desirability. As well I theorize around personal assistance/care relationships and create alternative support structures. I also love sun, sparkly things, and social justice. I am coming to DC to present at a day long seminar for and by young women with disabilities at American University. Then, of course I have to come to RVA and see my people (as well as eat biscuits and gravy at 821 Cafe).

I arrive in DC Friday, around 1ish and am around until Monday morning. Then I am heading to Richmond till Wednesday eve. I am traveling with a friend who can help out with some of my care, but I am in need of friendly recruits to help as well. Plus it's an awesome opportunity to meet fabulous and friendly people/see friends I have seen in too l ong!

How you can help: I use a wheelchair and I am looking to recruit folks to help with my personal care needs (fancy words for getting into/out of bed and going to the bathroom). No experience needed (I am really good at talking folks through it plus what I need help with is pretty straight forward) and ya only have to be sorta buff. I [weigh] around 130lbs, but it is not as bad as it seems. If you're worried about lifting I might be able to buddy you up or maybe you can buddy yourself up with a friend. Two people makes it way easier and yay for safety! :-) It doesn't take that long (around a 1 hour—usually less—to pee and a bit more to get into/outta bed. I usually pee at 12ish, 5ish and then when I get into bed and wake up. If you don't have a lot of time, even one shift would be so extremely helpful.

If you are interested let me know or if you know anyone else who might be interested, please send this their way (I appreciate people of all genders helping me). I need to know as soon as possible so that I know how stressed out to be. Plus we are coming soo soon! :) Also if you can send me your availability that would be amazing.

firmly ignoring) that we exist, they often reinvent the wheel(chair). I'm not the only crip who' felt bitter when I've seen calls for benefits and care earnestly sent out for someone who's bee able-bodied up to that point and now has an acute, sudden need, when I've watched myself an my friends who have chronic disabilities, have been disabled since birth or live with chroni physical illness or dance with madness/mental health, struggle to get responses to our everyda and acute asks for care and support.

These emergency-response care webs often really fall apart when and if the person they're fo becomes disabled in a long-term way, and the members realize that the "issue" isn't an individua problem that their buddy has—that beyond needing care, their friend is being impacted by th ableism of both the everyday world and much queer and activist space. Clubs they used to han with aren't wheelchair accessible (they notice for the first time); fighting with insurance companie and the access van take hours. Huh! Is this a thing? The emails start coming in to the one crip the know: "Hey, do you know where so and so can find accessible housing? Seems like it's kind of har to find." It's not that I don't want folks to access what they need—but I also have to roll my eye that these folks are noticing ableism for the first time. I want them to understand that the struggle their friend is facing are not new or unique to them, that although I'll usually share my knowledge so many of us have been using (limited) spoons16 to fight these fights for a long time.

If these care webs are going to keep working, a paradigm shift needs to occur in those friends heads. They need to see the disabled people they've blanked out on listening to for years whe we've been trying to talk about access or our lives. (An apology might be cool, too.) They need t understand that their friend isn't a special cripple, cooler than the rest—that the problems they'r facing aren't individual ones but systemic struggles that face all crips and need collective solutions They need to ask themselves why they have systematically refused to value or take in what disable folks around them have been and are saying. They need to listen and learn from the care work an skills disability communities have been doing for years—and maybe offer some compensation fo that knowledge. Or at least say thank you.

STORY FOUR: CCA BAY AREA

In the fall of 2010, some of us who'd been in Detroit came back to the Bay Area where we lived o moved there for the first time. And it occurred to us: Why didn't we try and do something simila here? What would it mean to take the temporary experiment in crip-of-color–made access that ha worked so beautifully during the four to ten days we'd be in Detroit to our homeplaces, in a long term way?

We dove right into the modest, wildly ambitious plan of attempting to create a Bay Area care collective by and for disabled queer and trans people of color.

We came together with a lot of hope and a ton of longing, a longing for a community we had bee wanting for most of our lives. We came together with so much need and so much fear, lik icebergs, where most of the mass lies below the surface.

When we sat down at our very first meeting, I thought I knew exactly how it was going to go When I thought about what I might need in terms of disability care and support, I could name right away: I could sure use some help driving my best friend to acupuncture and the grocery stor

and the mosque twice a week—I loved helping them, but between supporting them, supportin myself, and working two to three jobs, plus working on two or three unpaid collectives that wer each like part-time jobs, I was exhausted. And, in a smaller tone of voice that didn't reac outside my head, I could use folks who could help me do some stuff too.

This project turned out to be a little more complicated than I'd thought it would. Everyone had a lo of questions. Should CCA Bay be open to white folks or just POC? Just crips or non-disable QTBIPOC allies? Some argued that some of us had white crips in our "pods" of people we share care with already, so it wouldn't make sense to exclude them. Other folks felt strongly that whit disabled people always dominated crip space and did not want to risk creating a space where w would have to fight to continue to center people of color. Some felt that including non-disable BIPOC folks could help develop seed organizers who could work to make the non-disabled QTBIPO community less ableist.

But before we jumped into Google calendar, one member pulled out a flip chart. She said tha before we did anything we needed to talk what would allow us to give and receive care. Most of us she pointed out, had received shitty care, abusive care, care with strings attached. Most of us, sh guessed, would want to give care, and then shrug and say, "I don't know, I'm fine" when aske what we needed. We went around: What made it possible for us to receive care? What was boun up with that act of reception? Under what conditions could we be vulnerable?

These, it turned out, were very deep and necessary questions. Hard to answer ones. The cri $64,000 questions. That friend was right: all of us were eager to offer care; receiving care, not s much. It was so much easier to offer care to other people than to ask for what we needed, for s many reasons. Many of us had been raised as immigrants and/or women or femmes of color t always jump up and feed people first, do all the dishes, and help without being asked, whil serving ourselves last. For many of us, care had been something that was forced on us- something abusive family members or teachers or health care workers did, whether we liked it o not. Or care had been something it wasn't safe to say that we needed—because there was no car out there for us, no health care, no therapist, no parent with time, no safe parent who actuall cared. Maybe as disabled people, if we wanted to have any kind of independence, we had to den that we needed any help at all—in order to stay in mainstreamed classes, go to college, or date we had to say that we didn't have any needs. I can remember my mother clearly telling me in hig school, when I first thought I might be neurodivergent—it was decades before I would know tha word, but I was still really fucking clear that my brain and cognition and my ability to navigat space were very different from most people around me—that it was unsafe for me to say that might need a tutor —tutors and accommodations, newly allowed under the brand new ADA, wer for the rich white boys; I just had to be twice as smart and keep up if I wanted to get scholarship. I couldn't afford to look "stupid."

And finally, some of our needs were so vulnerable, so embarrassing, so complicated to ask fo that it was much easier to just not admit we needed them. In that go round, when I silentl thought, I could use some help too, one of the first things I thought of was that when I was sick, often needed help with housework—making my bed and doing dishes, chores, and laundry, buyin groceries, and cooking food. But as a working-class femme, raised by an ex-waitress mom wh taught me to always bus my own table, and as someone who'd cleaned houses for a living, I had strong working-class ethic about always doing my own housework. I couldn't imagine asking on

are working together to create collective access?

What is collective access? Collective Access is access that we intentionally create collectively, instead of individually.

Most of the time, access is placed on the individual who needs it. It is up to you to figure out your own access or, sometimes, up to you and your care giver, personal attendant (PA) or random friend. Access is rarely weaved into a collective commitment and way of being; it is isolated and relegated to an afterthought (much like disabled people).

Access is complex. It is more than just having a ramp or getting disabled folks/crips into the meeting. Access is a constant process that doesn't stop. It is hard and even when you have help, it can be impossible to figure out alone.

We are working to create mutual aid between crips and beyond! … We hope that together we can create a culture of collective access. We are just trying this out! would you like to join us in practicing what this could look like? do you have ideas? are you an ally/comrade who wants to help out or be on call?14

Creating Collective Access (CCA) was a crip15-femme-of-color-made piece of brilliance that came together in the summer of 2010. You can read much more about it at creatingcollectiveaccess.wordpress.com, but in my version of the story, CCA happened because three disabled queer Asian femmes were on a conference call to plan the workshops we were organizing at the 2010 Allied Media Conference (AMC) and US Social Forum (USSF)—an enormous social justice gathering bringing tens of thousands of people to Detroit to imagine a revolutionary future—and we were completely fucking stressed out about how we were going to survive those conferences.

This is a very common disability experience: getting ready to go travel to a conference and having your freak-out about how badly the whole thing will fuck up your body. Will the airport break your wheelchair? Will you get sick from a fragrance exposure? Will the accessible van or ASL promised in the conference material just not be there? Where will the food be, and is it stuff you can eat? Will you be 1,000% overstimulated by thousands of people talking about intense things? What if you have a panic attack or suicidal ideation 2,000 miles away from home and your usual supporters' access hacks? In short, how will you negotiate the world away from the crip survival skills you have where you live? We're used to feeling that our disability experiences are private, embarrassing, and not to be spoken about—especially crips who may be working mostly in non-disabled social justice communities—and conference and travel bring those feelings on even more so.

But in 2010, some of us came together at a nascent moment of disability justice organizing We came together as disabled queer and trans people of color, talking, sometimes haltingly, abou our intersectional lives, and talking about what disability organizing would mean that didn't leav any part of ourselves behind. We were rooted in a ground of other disabled queer and trans peopl of color, who were finding each other through online portals like the Azolla Story (a closed onlin portal for disabled queer and trans people of color, through the cultural, political work of Sin Invalid and the Disability Justice Collective, through our own blogs and chance meetings in crip of-color hallways, coming and going. And on that call, Stacey, Mia, and I had a profound momer

of clarity. We didn't have to choose between handling our access needs on our own or crossing ou
fingers that the conference and the airlines would come through to take care of us. We coul
experiment in coming together and caring for each other. What would it be like to create a space tha
centered Black and brown disabled people, that was led by disabled queer femmes of color, wher
instead of able-bodied people begrudgingly "helping" us, we were doing it for ourselves? We didn'
know, but we knew it would be the polar opposite of so much existing disabled spaces that wer
dominated by white crips and their casual and overt racism, so much mainstream space where w
were always on hold with access services. We didn't know what we were doing, and we knew wha
we were doing. We knew we were creating something revolutionary.

So we did it, and we did it quick, in the last three weeks before we had to go to Detroit—threw up
quick WordPress site asking for other sick and disabled queer, mostly Black and brown, people t
find us, for us to find each other. We knew we couldn't create access for thousands of people, but w
wanted to see what we could do with the resources we had.

And it worked: sick and disabled queer people of color found us, through email and Facebook post
and friends of friends, and, once we got there, through running into us on-site. It came together i
that effortless-feeling way that happens sometimes when something's time has come. There wa
so much creativity, hustle, and fun—and disabled queer of color brilliance. One member of CC
drove up from North Carolina to Detroit with two other disabled POC and her personal car
attendant in her wheelchair-accessible van. That van legally fits four people, but I have photos o
thirteen crips crammed into it and driving through Detroit, laughing our asses off. We share
information about why fragrance-free body care products are important and shared the actua
products, especially those for Black and brown hair and skin, with each other, including with peopl
who'd never heard of "fragrance-free" before but were down if it meant we were able to b
together. We booked a few accessible dorm suites so we could sleep and hang out with each other.

CCA was one of the first places I ran into what I would later call cross-disability solidarity, an
more than that, the reality of our different disabilities not being a liability, that there could b
ways we supported each other. One person selectively used some "poor, cute cripple" skills t
charm the dorm staff and get them to unlock the fourth-floor kitchen so we could cook and stor
groceries. One neurodivergent person who didn't have mobility problems walked a mile to th
closest restaurant to load up someone else's spare manual wheelchair with our shawarma order
and walked the food back to everyone who couldn't walk that far.

Being less isolated helped us make group demands of the AMC that were effective becaus
they came from collective disabled power, not just one individual crip writing a request on
registration form. The AMC ordered in fragrance-free soap for the washrooms because Detroi
back then didn't have any supermarkets, let alone one that stocked Dr Bronner's unscented. Th
relationships and collective power we built also helped us survive the USSF, which had som
major access challenges (like, no wheelchair-accessible shuttle, even though it was on all th
promo material, and when we called to ask where it was, the person we talked to was like, "Ca
you come to the conference site and ask about the shuttle?" and didn't quite get it when we wer
like, "No, we can't, because we can't physically get there"). I remember someone texting, "I ar
spooning out, I need crip love" from where they were passed out at one end of the conferenc
center, and all of us getting there as fast we could, and them saying that just watching us walk a

roll up made all the difference.

We didn't just survive the conference—we made powerful community. Committed to leaving no on behind, we rolled through the conference in a big, slow group of wheelchair users, cane users, an slow-moving people. Instead of the classic able-bodied conference experience most of us wer used to, where able-bodied people walked at their able-bodied rate and didn't notice we were tw blocks behind, or nowhere, we walked as slow as the slowest person and refused to abandon eac other. People got out of the way. Instead of going out to inaccessible party sites, we chose to sta in, and ate and shared about our disabled lives. For some of us, it was our first time doing tha People cried, flirted, and fell in love.

CCA changed everyone who was present for it and a lot of people who just heard about it. It wa just four days, but people went home to their communities transformed. We were no longe willing to accept isolation, or a tiny bit of access, or being surrounded by white disabled folks a the only kind of disability community we could access, or being forgotten. We talked about how i had been for us to be with each other. We threw queer disabled femme of color brunches tha were maybe just us and the three other sick and disabled femmes of color we knew, but we sat i bed and talked and talked about our lives. We tried out starting crip hangouts and zines an performance nights. We started thinking about what it would mean to have our own car collectives, on a permanent basis. We came back less willing to accept ableism from conference and community spaces, because we knew it could be different—and if CCA could happen i someplace with scarce physical resources like Detroit, it could happen anywhere. Being part o that wild pack of slowness, talking tentatively about our disabled lives in ways we'd never said ou loud before, changed everyone's lives.

AN ASIDE: STORY THREE: THE CRASH-AND-BURN EMERGENCY MODEL

In many able-bodied activist communities—QTBIPOC and mostly-white punk—I've been a part o I've been witness to another form of care web that is very different from the ones I've writte about so far. They're the emergency-response care webs that happen when someone able-bodie becomes temporarily or permanently disabled, and their able-bodied network of friends spring into action. When the friend gets hit by a car when they're on their bike or gets pneumonia, ther are emails and calls and care calendars set up, and (mostly able-bodied) people show up to th hospital. (Mostly able-bodied) people cook food and throw benefits. There's a sense of urgency Purpose! Action! OMG, someone is sick! We must come together as a community to help them (Many disabled people roll their eyes at this moment: Wow, when it's your mountain-climbin friend who gets hit riding their bike, you care, huh? For me and the other folks who are alway disabled, not so much, huh?)

The urgent care calendar care web lasts for a few weeks, a month. And then … people trickle of People think that the person's all better. It isn't a fun cause of the moment anymore. People think Wow, you're still disabled?

These models have a lot to learn from disability justice models of centering sustainability slowness, and building for the long haul. They tend to come from people who don't know, wel that disabled people or community or activism, um, exists. Since they don't know (or have bee

firmly ignoring) that we exist, they often reinvent the wheel(chair). I'm not the only crip who' felt bitter when I've seen calls for benefits and care earnestly sent out for someone who's bee able-bodied up to that point and now has an acute, sudden need, when I've watched myself an my friends who have chronic disabilities, have been disabled since birth or live with chroni physical illness or dance with madness/mental health, struggle to get responses to our everyda and acute asks for care and support.

These emergency-response care webs often really fall apart when and if the person they're fo becomes disabled in a long-term way, and the members realize that the "issue" isn't an individua problem that their buddy has—that beyond needing care, their friend is being impacted by th ableism of both the everyday world and much queer and activist space. Clubs they used to han with aren't wheelchair accessible (they notice for the first time); fighting with insurance companie and the access van take hours. Huh! Is this a thing? The emails start coming in to the one crip the know: "Hey, do you know where so and so can find accessible housing? Seems like it's kind of har to find." It's not that I don't want folks to access what they need—but I also have to roll my eye that these folks are noticing ableism for the first time. I want them to understand that the struggle their friend is facing are not new or unique to them, that although I'll usually share my knowledge so many of us have been using (limited) spoons16 to fight these fights for a long time.

If these care webs are going to keep working, a paradigm shift needs to occur in those friends heads. They need to see the disabled people they've blanked out on listening to for years whe we've been trying to talk about access or our lives. (An apology might be cool, too.) They need t understand that their friend isn't a special cripple, cooler than the rest—that the problems they'r facing aren't individual ones but systemic struggles that face all crips and need collective solutions They need to ask themselves why they have systematically refused to value or take in what disable folks around them have been and are saying. They need to listen and learn from the care work an skills disability communities have been doing for years—and maybe offer some compensation fo that knowledge. Or at least say thank you.

STORY FOUR: CCA BAY AREA

In the fall of 2010, some of us who'd been in Detroit came back to the Bay Area where we lived o moved there for the first time. And it occurred to us: Why didn't we try and do something simila here? What would it mean to take the temporary experiment in crip-of-color–made access that ha worked so beautifully during the four to ten days we'd be in Detroit to our homeplaces, in a long term way?

We dove right into the modest, wildly ambitious plan of attempting to create a Bay Area care collective by and for disabled queer and trans people of color.

We came together with a lot of hope and a ton of longing, a longing for a community we had bee wanting for most of our lives. We came together with so much need and so much fear, lik icebergs, where most of the mass lies below the surface.

When we sat down at our very first meeting, I thought I knew exactly how it was going to go When I thought about what I might need in terms of disability care and support, I could name right away: I could sure use some help driving my best friend to acupuncture and the grocery stor

and the mosque twice a week—I loved helping them, but between supporting them, supportin myself, and working two to three jobs, plus working on two or three unpaid collectives that wer each like part-time jobs, I was exhausted. And, in a smaller tone of voice that didn't reac outside my head, I could use folks who could help me do some stuff too.

This project turned out to be a little more complicated than I'd thought it would. Everyone had a lo of questions. Should CCA Bay be open to white folks or just POC? Just crips or non-disable QTBIPOC allies? Some argued that some of us had white crips in our "pods" of people we share care with already, so it wouldn't make sense to exclude them. Other folks felt strongly that whit disabled people always dominated crip space and did not want to risk creating a space where w would have to fight to continue to center people of color. Some felt that including non-disable BIPOC folks could help develop seed organizers who could work to make the non-disabled QTBIPO community less ableist.

But before we jumped into Google calendar, one member pulled out a flip chart. She said tha before we did anything we needed to talk what would allow us to give and receive care. Most of us she pointed out, had received shitty care, abusive care, care with strings attached. Most of us, sh guessed, would want to give care, and then shrug and say, "I don't know, I'm fine" when aske what we needed. We went around: What made it possible for us to receive care? What was boun up with that act of reception? Under what conditions could we be vulnerable?

These, it turned out, were very deep and necessary questions. Hard to answer ones. The cri $64,000 questions. That friend was right: all of us were eager to offer care; receiving care, not s much. It was so much easier to offer care to other people than to ask for what we needed, for s many reasons. Many of us had been raised as immigrants and/or women or femmes of color t always jump up and feed people first, do all the dishes, and help without being asked, whil serving ourselves last. For many of us, care had been something that was forced on us- something abusive family members or teachers or health care workers did, whether we liked it o not. Or care had been something it wasn't safe to say that we needed—because there was no car out there for us, no health care, no therapist, no parent with time, no safe parent who actuall cared. Maybe as disabled people, if we wanted to have any kind of independence, we had to den that we needed any help at all—in order to stay in mainstreamed classes, go to college, or date we had to say that we didn't have any needs. I can remember my mother clearly telling me in hig school, when I first thought I might be neurodivergent—it was decades before I would know tha word, but I was still really fucking clear that my brain and cognition and my ability to navigat space were very different from most people around me—that it was unsafe for me to say that might need a tutor —tutors and accommodations, newly allowed under the brand new ADA, wer for the rich white boys; I just had to be twice as smart and keep up if I wanted to get scholarship. I couldn't afford to look "stupid."

And finally, some of our needs were so vulnerable, so embarrassing, so complicated to ask fo that it was much easier to just not admit we needed them. In that go round, when I silentl thought, I could use some help too, one of the first things I thought of was that when I was sick, often needed help with housework—making my bed and doing dishes, chores, and laundry, buyin groceries, and cooking food. But as a working-class femme, raised by an ex-waitress mom wh taught me to always bus my own table, and as someone who'd cleaned houses for a living, I had strong working-class ethic about always doing my own housework. I couldn't imagine asking on

of my friends to clean my toilet or do my dishes without feeling like an asshole—even though I regularly and happily did chores for friends when they were sick.

We met an average of twice a week for a year. A lot of our time was spent building relationships hanging out, and supporting each other in different ways, from physical care to emotional care durin breakups. And we faced some challenges that many groups like ours have faced and will face agair We realized that even though we were all queer and trans disabled people of color, we didn automatically know each other's access needs cross-disability. People who were physically disable didn't automatically understand the needs of folks who were Mad, and vice versa. Sometimes, w thought of those misunderstanding as betrayals, instead of opportunities to own our mistakes or as each other to teach us.

Mia Mingus's often-quoted words, from her essay of the same name about committing to cri community, "Wherever you are is where I want to be"17 got put to the test when access need weren't complementary and we couldn't physically be in the same space. When someone neede help moving out of their house up two flights of stairs, even though the call for help said, "Come you can help move and lift boxes! Come by if you just want to lend moral support! Bring food t share" (suggesting that helping physically move boxes, bringing food, and offering moral suppor were all equally legit ways of supporting)—but if I was too fatigued to get out of bed and too brok to bring food, did that mean that I wasn't being a good community member? We were running int a similar challenge Loree had once talked about with an earlier care web she'd been involved ir What happens when chronically ill folks—who often have fatigue, lack of physical strength, and need to shift and cancel schedules as we get sick—try to assist physically disabled folks, who ofte need folks to be able to lift heavy things, and who may have pretty scheduled lives (e.g., chair user who have PCA care shifts when they pee scheduled every four to six hours)? We weren't alway great at sitting with those contradictions with kindness and curiosity, an "Okay, that didn't work- what would?

Often, instead, we experienced the places where interdependence didn't just magically work ou as betrayal, letting each other down. We had so many hopes for each other, so much belief tha we could be everything to each other, effortlessly and automatically, through shared identity. An we'd been betrayed so many times before, by white disabled people and non-disabled people i our lives, so we hoped that since we'd finally, finally found that beloved BIPOC sick and disable community, we'd never fuck up (or be tired), always know the right thing to do, and be able to d it. It turned out that, like every time I've come together with people I've shared an identity with there was bliss and also heartbreak when we assumed that that bliss would be easy and forever.

As romham of RAMP Vancouver writes:

> If interdependency is in our DNA, what does it mean when we fall out of whack with it?
>
> How do we handle the realities of our bodies and minds that need what they need when they need it? What does it mean when I can't support you in the ways you're supporting me? Does interdependency mean we do the same for one another at all times, as though there's even such a thing as "the same" when it comes to this stuff? Is it a gentle ebb and flow? What if my ebb will never match your flow? What if it's sometimes a torrential downpour and one of us is drowning? What do we do then?18

There were more questions. Like, what happened when some of us could hang together mor because we had fewer mobility needs—we could make it into a car, could deal with exposures- and some of us couldn't? How did we make things feel fair when some of us got tired and sick an needed to cancel, and others—maybe folks who practiced "sucking it up" and working throug pain more, maybe just folks who didn't have pain and fatigue—were left feeling like they wer doing all the work? What about those of us who felt more comfortable going to non-disable events together so got to spend that time and get that visibility, and those of us who felt mor overwhelmed or had more anxiety about being stared at?

And, maybe the biggest disabled community question of all: What happens when a lot of people wh have always been the only one, are no longer the only disabled queer of color in the room? How doe that affect how we work together, build community, and work out conflict? Sometimes, because w were used to being the only revolutionary crip fighting ableism in a sea of able-bodied obliviousness, was hard for us to hear that we weren't always right, to understand differences of opinion or approac or experience as other than wrong, or attack, or threat.

After a year, our group broke up, from all of these pressures and hard spots and a web c interpersonal conflict. It was a hard breakup. I felt like my dream sick and disabled QTBIPO crew had fallen apart, that a community I had passionately believed in and given much of m limited energy to had failed.

I didn't know that one group falling apart didn't have to mean that was it—for the idea c building a care web, for the movement. I wish we could've known that the struggles we hi weren't failures or signs of how inadequate we were but incredibly valuable learnings. I wis I'd known then what I do now—that all this stuff is the $6 million crip question, that we wer by far not the only disabled queers to struggle with them, and that our struggle to figure thes questions out is at the heart of our movement work. CCA is another worthy, imperfect model i my body's archive, one I build on as I build care in my life now.

STORY FIVE: AN ONGOING, VIRTUAL CARE WEB: SICK AND DISABLED QUEERS

Disabled Mizrahi genderqueer writer and organizer Billie Rain started Sick and Disabled Queer (SDQ), a Facebook group for well, sick, and disabled queers, in 2010. Billie started SDQ as a experiment in building an online community open to all sick and disabled queer people that woul center sick and disabled queer people of color and other folks who had traditionally bee marginalized from mainstream disability rights spaces, that would also be accessible to the man sick and disabled queers who were isolated, homebound, or had limited energy or ability to trave physically to an in-person meeting. Mostly, Billie wanted a place where a lot of sick and disable queer people could hang out in bed, online, and chat with each other. Over the eight years of it existence, SDQ blew up into a virtual, North America–wide community that both offered a hell of lot of practical care and support—shared knowledge about diseases and doctors and disabilit hearings, people witnessing each other and fundraising for rent and medical bills and accessibl vans—and became a locus of disability justice thinking, relationship building, and organizing.

It is impossible for me separate the care work SDQ members did from the theories we made from how we shared tools, wrote poetry, and created friendships. SDQ folks regularly mailed eac

other meds and extra inhalers and adaptive equipment. We shared, when asked, information abou what treatments worked for us and what didn't and tips for winning a disability hearing. W crowdsourced money for folks who needed to replace stolen wheelchairs, detox their houses, ge living expenses together for rehab, or get out of unsafe housing situations. People sent car packages and organized visit teams for members they might never have met in person who were i the hospital, rehab, or the psych ward. We cocreated an evolving, amazing cross-disability bes practices/community guidelines document that helps folks learn about the disabilities that aren' ours—from captioning videos to neurodivergent communication styles. At its height, it wa everything good that social media made possible—instant connection with a million people wit shared identities and interests, who could listen to you when you were in crisis or answer disability question that no one near you knew the answer to. It was a structure that broke two of th biggest barriers most disabled people face—isolation and shame.

SDQ felt like a hot spot of disability justice in practice. Some of the smartest DJ though happened here, and mostly, it felt free of "activist stardom" but filled with collective disable intelligence. Instead of a few Special Crips, it felt like a place where a lot of folks, ofte especially folks who were deeply isolated and excluded from systemic power and the worlc got to think and talk with each other, take and share pictures of ourselves in bed, share tip about hypermobility and sex, diagnose each other way faster than the free clinic could—an also ask big questions about disability, art, sex, activism, and life. SDQ at its best functione as a big, sustainable, pretty damn cross-accessible care web powered by members who wer homebound, not working a lot, isolated, on disability, and who had time to throw dow support, prayers, and connection via text, the internet, or phone. Because the format was tex based, it was Deaf accessible and accessible to folks for whom voice and in-perso communication is hard. It was and is a more challenging/less accessible format for folks wh are working, anxious, or overwhelmed by a lot of internet, or EMF sensitive so that being o the computer is hard or impossible.

SDQ had a community value of people responding how they can, as they can, with no shame if the didn't have capacity. SDQ is also a model of what we mean when we try to explain that disable people know how to do sustainability. SDQ was inherently very sustainable because it wasn't jus you trying to ask your crew of six local people for help—you could reach out to thousands of peopl across the world, and someone would always be up, someone would always have cash or capacity c energy to talk you through whatever it was. SDQ grew from a community with one moderator to on with six, so there was always someone to step in if someone else was sick or spooned out. SDQ fe like a living example of what sustainable organizing looks like, led by people who are pushed out c 99% of able-bodied mainstream activism and are told that we aren't capable of doing any kind c organizing or political activity.

I remember a heated debate on SDQ where a new member said they liked the space, but i "didn't seem like there was much activism going on here." People got really heated. We talke passionately about how what we were doing on SDQ—the talking and the meds-sharing and th scheming and the life support—absolutely counted as activism, was a way we wer transforming traditional notions of what activism was to make it over in our own cripped-ou images. And that without the life support we were giving each other, we wouldn't be able t stay alive to do activism, or life, at all.

CARE FUTURES

As I write this, Trump is in his second year. We've withstood his government's attempts to destro the ADA, the Affordable Care Act's access to health care for disabled and sick people, and Medicaid' funding of paid home attendant care. Everyone I know is a mix of on edge, permanently wonderin what shit will hit the fan next, trying not to be stuck in reactivity and panic, and sometimes, absurdl hopeful and passionate about building the futures we need.

I am ten years in to these wild experiments with collective access and care, and I am bot grateful for the stories under my belt and full of the knowledge of how much I still don't know I continue to live a life supported by a practice of being able to call on kin in emergencies an everyday need and being able to respond to need. I am a veteran of many emergency car circles and GoFundMes that have come together when someone is facing a disability crisis- eviction, medical bills, emergencies, mental health crisis. I know some things about how t organize a circle of people who can offer care, stop by with food, send money, and text peopl but as I move forward in this life of creating and receiving care, I am continually impressed b how we find ways to keep each other alive when the state is fucked, and community can b fucked and inadequate too. I love seeing how friends and strangers seem to be more and mor used to crowdfunding care and setting up care shift Google docs. I also see the burnout an exploitation of often femme and disabled labor that happens, and also what happens whe people plain run out of energy, money, and time. I think about the needs I have that I am still to ashamed to let anyone see, let alone take care of.

I also think about friends and strangers who have plenty of needs but not enough friends o strangers willing and able to come through to care for them. The community is not a magi utopia, just like our families weren't, and we don't all just magically love each other, or even lik each other, let alone agree on every political issue. I think about people I know who are mean o angry or bitter or "hard to like"—and disabled—and how that confluence is not a surprise or a accident, because many of us are indeed in a shitty mood, mean, or bitter from withstandin decades of ableism and the isolation that it brings. I think about the people I know who I don' want to die lying in their own piss, but I don't want to be the one who changes their diape either. I think about the things I still can't ask friends to help me with—cleaning the house whe it's incredibly nasty after I've been in pain for weeks, dealing with shit or blood. I think about m friend's statement that she shouldn't have to rely on being liked or loved to get care.

I recently realized I was hitting caregiving burnout—something I was familiar with as concept but never thought would happen to me—with a loved one after many months of chroni illness and mental health crisis on both our parts. After a Google search connected me with caregivers' website for my county and I sent an email, I got a nice phone call back from someon from who told me that we would be eligible for twenty-four hours of emergency respite care- someone would be paid by the county to show up, pick up the meds, do the dishes, cook som food, and listen. She tactfully said, "Many people find they have an easier time with someone wh is being paid, well, to do the work, coming in and helping than asking a friend to clean and cook. When I told my friend that this existed, not only did they agree, they exclaimed, "How come a our friends aren't using this, instead of just burning each other out?" I know the answers—shame lack of access to the web, thinking that it doesn't exist or the actuality that it really doesn't exist o

we won't be eligible or we'll have to jump through rings of fire to get it. And it made me see more possibilities.

I don't think there is any one single answer to the need for care. I just want, to echo my friend Dor more care, more of the time. I want us to dream mutual aid in our postapocalyptic revolutionar societies where everyone gets to access many kinds of care—from friends and internet strangers from disabled community centers, and from some kind of non-fucked-up non- state state tha would pay caregivers well and give them health benefits and time off and enshrine sick an disabled autonomy and choice. I want us to keep dreaming and experimenting with all these big ambitious ways we dream care for each other into being.

SOME TOOLS AND PITFALLS TO WATCH OUT FOR, FOR FOLKS DREAMING CARE WEBS

Crips supporting crips! Only! Ever! Crip-on-crip support is awesome! Often, after a lifetime of ableist able-bodied people providing shitty or abusive care and assuming that we're not able to do anything ourselves, disabled people caring for each other can be a place of deep healing. Many, if not most of us, have good reasons not to trust that able-bodied people will actually get it, will actually come through on their promises of care or support. Lots of disabled folks I know who are well versed in this experience also understand that it's mostly only other sick and disabled folks who actually show up for each other. We can be projectile vomiting and we'll still send you a supportive text from the side of the toilet.

However, moving together as disabled people, in my mind, has some important caveats. Solidarit with other crips also means the realities of an inaccessible world and cross-ability access. If I ar chronically ill and don't have the energy/strength to lift you onto the toilet, that doesn't mean I am bad ally. There's also the reality that sometimes we all need care, simultaneously. I've often seen crip only spaces fill with feelings of betrayal and hopelessness when we cannot fulfill some of our friends needs. Instead, I believe it's possible to build a model of experimenting and seeing how it works ou then adjusting. We can try, knowing we may fail and things may turn out to be more complicated tha we expected.

I also think that recruiting non-disabled folks who actually have their shit together (or can b trained to) can be a great option for some care. And what about paying some folks, in cash o work/skill trade, some of the time for spoons or energy-demanding labor? How about valuing system of people contributing as they can, not necessarily "equally" or "always"?

Assuming that as crips we intrinsically understand each other's access needs, or that access intimac (even when we have the same kind of disability) is automatic. Or that even if we really get each other' shit at first, our needs don't change over time.

Not paying attention to the gendered/raced/classed dynamics of care—a.k.a., are the poc and working-class disabled femmes doing all the work all the time? Care is feminized an invisibilized labor. Care is something that many (not all) poor/working-class folks do lik breathing—we got time! It's just the right thing to do, right? What's going on with race an entitlement? Who feels comfy asking? Are the white queers, the pretty queers, the middle-class relatively happy, skinny, normal queers getting much care? How many masculine-gendered peopl have I cared the ass off for, with no reciprocity? Talk about this stuff! It's really important

Disrupt it! Get the masc, pretty, abled people to put in time!
Doing all the admin work yourself! So often I've seen sick and disabled folks do everything —all th caregiving, all the resource buying, and all the emailing and filing. Get some eager able- bodie person to manage the damn calendar!
Assuming there is one right way to do "it"—it being the ways we offer or organize care— and that way that works for a while won't change. The circle of six people who come together at first may nc be able to keep doing everything forever. The one person who was so great at doing th admin/organization end of things may get really sick of doing it, especially if they're holding all th notes in their head. Build capacity. Share the tools someplace everyone can access them. Switch ou roles. Plan for people giving care to have our own crises. Having only one person with the skills an capacity to coordinate stuff is a recipe for burnout.
Assuming that care webs have to be huge or that someone else somewhere is the "expert." We're s used to disabled care being professionalized, to assuming that medical and therapeutic professional are the only ones qualified to intersect with our terrifying bodies. But the first CCA was created o three weeks' notice. Collective care, like transformative justice, can be so many things—a "crip you hangout" hangout, an ASL meetup, a Lotsa Helping Hands calendar, a hangout where I bring you foo and we smoke high-CBD weed.

Sometimes it's not perfect. Often, disabled folks are (surprise) isolated. Some people have a bi community to draw on; many of us don't. But just like some access is better than none, som (good) care can be better than none—and can be built on.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU START A CARE WEB OR COLLECTIVE, AND KEEP ASKING

- What is the goal of your care web? Who needs care? What kind?
- Who's in it? What are their roles: caregiver, care receiver, both, admin person, fundraiser?
- How are you resisting the charity model in your work?
- What are best practices that allow the people receiving care to receive care well?
- What are best practices that allow the people offering care to offer care well?
- What physical tools (A van? Scent-free cleanser? A car? A smartphone?) do you need to make the access work? What money or other resources do you need to make it happen?
- How will you celebrate and make it fun?
- How will you build in time off and times when people are sick and you need a plan B?
- What meeting structure do you need to check in, talk through issues, and keep things on track?
- Are you building in ways for disabled folks to offer care, instead of assuming that only able-bodied people are the "care-ers"?
- What's your plan for dealing with conflict when it happens?
- How are you going to document your work? Do you need a place to keep receipts, a log of who does what hours?
- Do you have a plan for checking in and making sure funky dynamics aren't creeping into your care? This could be anything from pity, martyrdom, guilt, or difficulty negotiating boundaries to the ways gender dynamics (women or femme people doing more care than masculine people and receiving less, expectations that many genders of people are supposed to "have it all together"), race dynamics (universalization of white experience, racism creeping in when Black or brown people are doing cleaning or physical care for white folks), class dynamics, whorephobia, internalized ableism, or cross-disability dynamics (for example, the differences between the experiences of more visibly/apparently disabled folks and those whose disabilities are invisiblized). (These are just some examples, not an exhaustive list.) It helps to view these issues coming up as part of the work and to have a proactive, scheduled time to check in about them.

Queens in Exile, the Forgotten Ones

Sylvia Rivera

Sylvia Rivera is the founder of Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a veteran of the Stonewall uprising, and a long-time political activist. She lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., with her partner, Julia, and works at the Metropolitan Community Church in Manhattan.

My mother was 22 when she decided to off herself. She was having a shaky second marriage; my stepfather was a drug dealer, and that was one of the reasons the marriage was on shaky grounds. He threatened to kill her and me and my sister. I was 3 years old.

She mixed rat poison into milk, drank it, and gave some to me. I believe the brand was JR Rat Poison, and it came in a light reddish-orange tin. When they took me off to get my stomach pumped was the last time I saw my mother alive, because after being in the hospital three days, she died.

She drank her poison, and I drank only part of what she gave me because I didn't like the taste of the milk. I added sugar to it. I didn't know what it was, but it just didn't taste right. I remember seeing her laid out in the coffin. Back in those days you had to wake a body for three days. It was like sheer torture, but in my mind she was sleeping. My grandmother told me after I was grown up more that I tried to wake

her up, that I disturbed her in her coffin. One of the last things she told my grandmother on her deathbed was that she wanted to kill me because she knew I was going to have a hard life. And she pinpointed it, because it has not been an easy road. I've enjoyed the struggles, but I've also had my bouts with trying to off myself.

I was very effeminate as a young child. Life wasn't easy with my grandmother because she always told me that she never really wanted me, that she wanted my sister. My sister was taken away from her when my stepfather put her up for adoption. My grandmother never forgave me for that; she wanted my sister because she was a girl, and I was a boy.

I basically grew up without love. I guess in her own strict way my grandmother loved me. She did want me to acquire a good education. She insisted in putting me in all-white Catholic schools. And she didn't want me to learn the Spanish language. It upset her when I spoke to her in Spanish.

She wanted me to be a white child. She was a prejudiced woman. I mean, dark people, African-American people, would scare her. She came from Venezuela. She would have a little gesture or say something when black people would come on the subway or something; she would either rub her arm and say, "Look at them, they're coming," or she would call them "blonds" and look dead in their direction. She was a very racist woman.

She did not approve of my mother's marriages because both men were Puerto Ricans. My father was a very dark-skinned Puerto Rican. My stepfather was not as dark. My grandmother didn't like the idea of me having Puerto Rican blood. It would have been better if I had just been a Venezuelan child.

I was wearing makeup in the fourth grade. I did it because I liked makeup, and I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. I remember being questioned about it by my teacher, and I said, "Yeah, my grandmother knows." Of course it was a lie. She didn't know because there was a woman who was taking care of me out on Long Island, and I would put on my makeup on my way to school. I knew I could wear it home and take it off by 5 o'clock without having any problems because there was nobody in the house.

So to me it was normal. I really didn't get much of a slacking from the kids. I remember only one child, and he was the sixth-grade bully.

who called me a faggot because I always played with the girls. At the time, I was either playing hopscotch or doing double Dutch. And I just went off on him. I beat the daylights out of him, and I don't remember much of it, but I do remember the confrontation in front of our principal. The principal asked me, "Why did you beat him up?" I said, "He called me a faggot. Do I look like a faggot to you?" I was painted, you know, and had on these tight, tight pants. I didn't know what a faggot was, but I felt insulted. I had already had sex, but I thought it was all part of just being who you were.

I only felt how unusual this was when I was back on the lower east side with my grandmother where I had to go on the weekends. It was a male-dominant culture. Of the boys I hung around with, I slept with one. The other boys knew where I was coming from. Every once in a while there were remarks. A lot of the women would make innuendos. A woman one time patted me on my ass and said, "Huh, your ass is getting big, that means you're getting pumped," and I took offense at that because I knew when I was home—you know, on the lower east side—that there was something wrong with what I was doing. My grandmother used to come home and it smelled like a French whorehouse, but that didn't stop me. I got many ass-whippings from her.

Before I even left home, I was turning tricks with my uncle for money. We didn't have much money, and I wanted things my grandmother couldn't buy. In the beginning I didn't know who I was attracted to. I'd look at men in old movies and get fascinated by them, but my sexuality was aroused when I was 7 years old. My cousin was baby-sitting me, and I always found him attractive. He offered and I accepted.

As I've grown up, I've realized that I do have a certain attraction to men. But I believe that growing up the way I did, I was basically pushed into this role. In Spanish cultures, if you're effeminate, you're automatically a fag; you're a gay boy. I mean, you start off as a young child and you don't have an option—especially back then. You were either a fag or a dyke. There was no in-between. You have your journey through society the way it is structured. That's how I fit into it at that time in my life. Those were the words of that era. I was an effeminate gay boy. I was becoming a beautiful drag queen, a beautiful drag-queen child. Later on, of course, I knew that Christine [Jorgensen] was already around, but those things were still waiting in the backs of people's minds.

Being on my own at 10 years old, on the street in Times Square, was frightening. I had to be resourceful. I had already experienced the hustling scene with my uncle. I had found my way to 42nd Street by the comments made when my family used to go to Coney Island. The adults would say about people who got on at 42nd Street who were effeminate and wearing makeup, "Oh, look at the *maricóns*," and I would have to turn my face away because it hurt me to hear that. They would say, "This is where the *maricóns* come and they make money." Of course, that registered in my head, and I found my way back there and dipped and dabbed and made money selling my body. So when I left home to 42nd Street for good I wasn't seasoned, but I knew what I had to do to survive.

I was adopted by a few young (but older than I was) drag queens. They helped me out. We hung out all night. Chickie lived with her mother in Brooklyn somewhere and she knew that her mother went to work at a certain time, so she'd bring three or four queens home and we'd crash and get out of there before her mother came home. It was like roaming from house to house, or I'd stay in the hotel room the trick would rent.

I was afraid, but I didn't really think of it because I needed to survive. I found it disgusting, though. I used to go home and scrub myself clean. This was in the early '60s. The drag scene was a night life. We basically didn't go out during the day. I guess we had to hide. Also, if you're out all night, you don't want to be out during the day.

But it was dangerous on 42nd Street. We all stuck together. The police were constantly chasing us. We had a code: If one of the girls or one of the boy hustlers spotted a cop, word was passed down that "Lily in blue" was coming. This meant we would disappear. So a warning of "Alice in the blue gown" or "Lily" meant to disperse.

I was too young to go to the few clubs that existed, but there were many house parties. They were called rent parties. There was always something going on. And it was fun, you know, because people needed money for their rent. Fifty cents, a dollar...you helped somebody out and you might end up crashing there some time. That was basically the scene for the youth back then, except for the drag balls. But you had to be a little older than I was to start going with that group of people.

You had drag balls up in Harlem and you had them downtown. We had the Phil Black's ball, we had the April in Paris ball...those were

the two main ones. And there were balls constantly going on. I know the April in Paris ball used to be held at the Manhattan Center on 34th Street.

Balls gave us a social affair. If you didn't go, you just weren't part of the in crowd. And what talent you saw there! There were women who spent a year sewing and designing their costumes, just to get ready for one ball. And the hairstyles with 20 wigs…I'm exaggerating—we'll say seven or eight piled on top of one another. Being brought in in a gilded cage carried by half-naked young men. It was something extravagant and beautiful, something you don't see in balls today.

We had cross-dressers, but I didn't even know what cross-dressers were until much later. The street queens have always been prostitutes to survive, because some of us left home so early, or it just wasn't feasible to be working if you wanted to wear your makeup and do your thing. But there was that division at the balls where you had drag queens who were not from the same side of the tracks we were. Some of them were very affluent.

There were always drugs on the streets. In the early '60s there were a lot of ups. I got my Benzedrine supply from my truck driver customers. I was fascinated by speed. Besides alcohol. But those were my drugs of preference back in the mid '60s to early '70s. And then I changed around. I did a lot of heroin. I did heroin for about five years. Actually I've done everything that's been put out, especially in the '70s…LSD…basically everything, even to modern-day crack. But I haven't done ecstasy. And most everything I've kicked on my own.

I just sobered up off booze two years ago. I'm sober for the first time in my life without any alcohol in my body, and I've been drinking since before I left home. I started dipping at home, drinking booze about the age of 8. I always drank booze, besides taking all the other drugs. I'd mix my drugs and my booze together. It was something I thought was going to kill me. I thank my lucky stars. Somebody must be watching. Some higher power has been watching me 'cause I've tried to off myself at least six or seven times. It just wasn't meant to be.

I met Marsha Johnson like a year after I hit the streets. Marsha, I believe, was seven years my senior. It was Halloween night and she had just come out of the Port Authority because she still lived in Jersey with her family. She was dressed up in drag. A bunch of Spanish queens started going, "Oh, look at Marsha," and this one queen named Louisa

snatched Marsha's wig. Well, Marsha wasn't going to have it. When she caught up to Louisa up on 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue she beat the living daylights out of her.

Then one time I was walking across Sixth Avenue and she was standing there on the corner. She called me to her side, we introduced ourselves, and a very strong sistership was born. She took me out to eat. She was standing there hustling even though she was working as a waiter at Childs' Restaurant. But she always had to make extra change, as she always said.

And later on we would see each other at clubs or at different gatherings. She knew my first lover and came to my apartment out in Jersey. We stood by each other, had each other's back for many years. And even back in the days of pre-Stonewall, we would sit on 44th Street, a lot of us girls like Marsha and Vanessa, Miss Edwina, Miss Josie, a whole bunch of us, would sit around in a room. We'd be getting high or something and we'd start talking politics. We'd start talking politics and about when things were going to change for us as human beings.

After Stonewall, Marsha and I just kept up the struggle. We saw the need after being out on the streets at our ages. We needed to help our own people. Even when we were living on 44th Street, Marsha always took in people, gave them a place to stay. At that time, before Stonewall, everyone always had a house full of people, people crashing because there was no room. If one queen had a place and you were her friend, she would gladly let you sleep on her floor or share her bed. There would be not just the two of us; there would be maybe four or five. And everybody was sneaking around not wanting to get caught by whoever we were renting from.

There are two stories of how Marsha died. One is that she supposedly committed suicide, and the other is that somebody murdered her. They fished her body out of the Hudson River at the end of Christopher Street nine years ago. It was very shocking for me when I got the telegram. Actually I was really pissed at her because our pact was that we would cross the Jordan together. She would get angry with me when I tried to off myself, so we made a pact. That's why I find it hard to believe she committed suicide.

Marsha had been on SSI (Social Security Disability) for quite some time because she had several nervous breakdowns. She had been locked up several times in Bellevue and Manhattan State. Her mind

started really going. She had a doctor who did not diagnose her syphilis right away. So when they finally caught it, it was in the second stages. Marsha lived in her own realm, and she saw things through different eyes. She liked to stay in that world, so with that and the syphilis infection...and then her husband, Cantrell, was shot by an off-duty officer. He was shot to death and she really went over the edge.

She managed to come out of that one, and then she lost it again. She came over to my house dressed like the Virgin Mary, in white and blue, and she was carrying a wooden cross and a Bible. She came in and started preaching the Bible to me and we had a few words. Then she took the wooden cross and hit me upside the head with it. If it had been any other queen, I would probably be in jail, 'cause I would have killed her. She drew blood because the nail wasn't completely bent, and she put a gash in my head.

The next day I heard they arrested her and locked her up again. So she had several breakdowns. Bob Kohler, who was very close to her and to me, says that she committed suicide. He was closer to her the last few months. She always would go down to the end of Christopher Street, supposedly talking to her brother and wanting to go talk to her father in the water.

And there is testimony that some guys were messing with her and they threw her in the river. The police couldn't prove it. So I'm still stuck in the middle. When I heard that she was murdered, I couldn't understand why anybody would kill her. Marsha would give the blouse off her back if you asked for it. She would give you her last dollar. She would take off her shoes. I've seen her do all these things, so I couldn't see someone killing her. I know there are crazy people out there. I know there are transphobic people out there. But it's not like she wasn't a known transperson. She was loved anywhere she went. Marsha was a great woman.

Being arrested for "loitering with the intention of prostitution" became a routine, you know, 'cause I knew I was getting out the next day. The process is that they'll keep you, they'll process you, and you'll go in front of a judge. The judge will most likely dismiss the charge 'cause they go by your record. In all the years I was out there hustling—and that's between hustling and still doing politics—I was blessed because I was never arrested for prostitution. It was always "with the

intention" or just standing out on a corner, loitering. So I never got arrested or did time for prostitution.

The judge paid people like me no mind because I had no convictions. Cases would be thrown out, so it would never be on my record. Most of the girls had records, so that's what the judge would go by. To get busted for pros you had to do a solicitation—or they entrapped you. A lot of the girls would ask me how come I wouldn't go with a customer, and I suppose it was because I got the wrong vibe. I believed he was the Man.

"Aw," they'd say, "you always saying that."

"All right, when he comes back around you take him. I'm not jumping in the Man's car." Of course I'd see them 15 or 30 days later and I'd say, "Oh, so we were on vacation again, huh?"

"Yeah, I shoulda listened to you, Sylvia."

I go by what I feel. What my spirits tell me, I'm following. Every time I went with what my spirits told me (except for two times, and both times I had to fight my way out of a situation), I was right. My instincts would-say no, I'd rather starve to death. And the girls wouldn't listen. And Marsha used to be the same way. I would tell her, "Don't go with that man."

"Aw, Miss Thing, stop…"

"I'll see you when you get home in 30 days."

But I was lucky. The only time I did time was for possession of heroin. And the cops who arrested me told me, "We couldn't get you one way, so we figure we had to get you another way." The cops in the area I worked at that time, which was downtown on Chrystie Street by the Bowery, were angry because they could never bust me for pros.

I did get into cars with undercover agents, not realizing until too late. I had one cop pull a gun out on me and say, "You're gonna do me or I'm gonna take you in."

I'm like, "Fine, take me in, I don't care." Then I pop the door open to jump out of the car.

He says, "If you get out of the car, I'll shoot…"

I say, "Aw, you'll be doing the world a favor, one less queer in the world, one less junkie…one less ho!" And I got out very grandly, walked to the corner, and then ran like a bat out of hell.

I was bold; I would take these chances. Why should I give this man a blow job, not knowing whether he's going to take me to jail or not? I don't like the idea of giving free service. I'm not out there to give anyone

free service. At that time I was a heroin addict and I had a bunch of kids to support in STAR House. I had no time for games.

And there was another incident. I told the man where to park and he didn't, just kept on going and running through red lights. He said, "I'm taking you in for pros." And I said, "No, you're not." And he was going at a high speed. I popped the door open and threw myself out of the car, rolled, then hit the street running.

I was untouchable until the heroin thing. For that I got sentenced 90 days. That first night I fall asleep and my bullpen is packed with men. I wake up sick as a dog because I need a fix and I think, *Aw, shit, I'm fucked.* And there's one guy I know from the streets, so he gives me some protection, for a while. But when they take him upstairs to the Tombs, I'm left alone with all these other men. And suddenly they start hitting on me. "Come on, mama. I been in here for a year. I need a good piece of pussy," and blah, blah, blah… And I'm like, "Oh, no, we're not having this."

So I get knocked around a couple of times. I fight back, I holler for the C.O., and he comes to the cell. "What's the problem?" And I say, "These guys are trying to take me off," and he very nicely tells them, "Enjoy yourselves, boys, have fun." So I have to think fast. "O-o-okay…but we only suck dick. I'm sorry, I just don't get fucked up." Well, I guess they were dumb, because if some ho—you have a woman cornered and this woman is telling you that all she does is suck dick—then you know she must have an ulterior motive.

The one I ended up giving head to regretted it. I didn't stop biting that boy's dick until I drew blood, and they beat me so hard on my head for me to let go. That gave me a reputation. By the time I got to Rikers Island that evening, it was "That's the crazy bitch that bit that boy's dick. Leave her alone." It's always good to play crazy.

But it is rough for some of the girls, because they give it up. And once you give it up, you gotta give it up to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. So automatically you try to protect yourself in the hope that you don't get killed in the process, or you give it up and be used for all the time you're in jail. So I'd rather take the easy way out. I'd rather be dead than be subject to that. I'd always managed to protect myself.

Jail is not a happy place for transwomen and gay boys. It's a very unhappy place. Even though you're segregated, kept out of the general population, you have boys who would sign the papers that they were

homos. I used to find that fascinating, that every time I'd been arrested, they'd have this big stamp that stamps all your records HOMO in big red letters. I used to crack up about that. I said, "Jesus, couldn't you just put it in a little box?" No, they got to put it all over in red letters.

You asked to be segregated. Drag queens didn't have to ask for it. We were automatically segregated. But anyone could say they were gay and they'd let them through. So the boys would try to run your quad, except that when you had a bunch of queens on one floor, it was very hard for the men to dominate. A lot of times there were fights on the quad with the boys 'cause they would try to rule and the girls would not have it. It's like, "This is our property and we don't wish to be here, but this is our vacation spot and you are here…I guess…because you want to get your dick sucked…" Many of those boys who claimed to be straight and signed the papers as homos were the first ones to fall down to their knees when you were in the cell with them or turn on their stomachs wanting to get fucked. There's a reason behind everything.

I thought about having a sex change, but I decided not to. I feel comfortable being who I am. That final journey many of the transwomen and transmen make is a big journey. It's a big step and I applaud them, but I don't think I could ever make that journey. Maybe it comes of my prejudice when so many in the late '60s and early '70s ran up to the chop shop up at Yonkers General. They would get a sex change and a month, maybe six months, later they'd kill themselves because they weren't ready. Maybe that made me change my mind. I really don't know, but I always like to be an individual. In the beginning I decided that not getting the operation was because I wanted to keep the "baby's arm."

My first lover taught me how to make love to another man, and in my youth I was always supposed to be the bottom. This is the way I thought a relationship was…an effeminate gay boy was solely to be the bottom. My lover was a butch-looking boy, very butch. Actually, no one even knew he was gay.

He showed me how to make love. He said, "When you're with another man, this is the way men make love." It was very hard in the beginning. He would ask me and I would refuse to make love to him 'cause I didn't think he was telling me the truth. But he knew exactly what I was doing. After we would make love he'd go out, and he'd tell

me, "You wait for me to leave to masturbate, to jerk off when we can be doing that together. That's what love is about."

People now want to call me a lesbian because I'm with Julia, and I say, "No. I'm just me. I'm not a lesbian." I'm tired of being labeled. I don't even like the label *transgender*. I'm tired of living with labels. I just want to be who I am. I am Sylvia Rivera. Ray Rivera left home at the age of 10 to become Sylvia. And that's who I am.

I will be 50 years old this coming Monday. I don't need the operation to find my identity. I have found my niche, and I'm happy and content with it. I take my hormones. I'm living the way Sylvia wants to live. I'm not living in the straight world; I'm not living in the gay world; I'm just living in my own world with Julia and my friends.

The night Stonewall happened everybody was out partying. People were mourning, even me. We were mourning Judy Garland's death. Some authors have said that the riot came out of Judy Garland's death, but that's not true. Judy had nothing to do with the riot. Nor was any of it planned. It was something that just happened.

I guess there was tension in the air. It was a hot, muggy night, in the 80s or 90s, like when most riots happen. I don't know how many other patrons in the bar were activists, but many of the people were involved in some struggle. I had been doing work in the civil rights movement, against the war in Vietnam, and for the women's movement.

The bar paid off the cops at the beginning of the week, supposedly, on Monday night. A lot of bars were run by the Mafia. They paid off the police in the sixth precinct. Inspector Pine, who officiated the raid on Stonewall, had just been given his job as head of the morals squad. They were out to bust all the corruption in the police department and also close down these bars.

So the Stonewall was the first place he hit on in his new job. I'm in a book with him by David Isay. He says he thought it was going to be a routine bust. That's why they went in with only a few men. But to his surprise, we fought back. As he put it, "*Those* people would never give us any problem, because they had a lot to lose." So this night was different. This was the start of our talking back, speaking up for ourselves.

They came in; the lights went on. People ran for the bathrooms and got rid of their drugs. We stopped dancing. People started pairing off with someone of the opposite sex to try to make it look as "normal"

as we could. And here the law walks in and it's, "Faggots here, dykes here, and freaks over here." The queens and the real butch dykes were the freaks.

Then we were proofed. You had to have on three articles of clothing that accorded to your gender. That was a law. So females had to have three pieces of women's clothing. It could be whatever, as long as the cop decided to accept it. At that time, the '60s, we called it *scare* drag. We were out a lot during the day with makeup, blouses, women's slacks—but no tits. We called it scare drag so we could say we weren't in drag.

To that point it was a typical bust. They proofed us. We went out the door. But no one dispersed. 'Cause usually we'd go somewhere and have coffee and come back in 15, 20 minutes. The padlock was cut off, and it was back to business—drinking watered-down booze, buying drugs, and dancing.

What people fail to realize is that the Stonewall was not a drag queen bar. It was a white male bar for middle-class males to pick up young boys of different races. Very few drag queens were allowed in there, because if they had allowed drag queens into the club, it would have brought the club down. That would have brought more problems to the club. It's the way the Mafia thought, and so did the patrons. So the queens who were allowed in basically had inside connections. I used to go there to pick up drugs to take somewhere else. I had connections.

The main drag queen bar at that time was the Washington Square Bar on Third Street and Broadway. That's where you found diesel dykes and drag queens and their lovers. Oh, yeah, we mixed with lesbians. We always got along together back then. All that division between the lesbian women and queens came after 1974 when Jean O'Leary and the radical lesbians came up. The radicals did not accept us or masculine-looking women who dressed like men. And those lesbian women might not even have been trans. But we did get along famously in the early '60s. I've been to many a dyke party. And transgendered men back then were living and working. I met many who were working and living as men with their female lovers. They were highly respected. The lesbian community today has a lot to learn from the old ways of the lesbian community.

I didn't really get involved in gay politics until 1970. After

Stonewall, I was getting my news from the *Gay Power* newspaper, and I was at the founding of the Gay Activists Alliance. That was the first real political meeting I went to. They were just getting their platform statement, their mission statement. I saw an ad in the paper, and I called the number and said, "Hello, do you take drag queens?"

They said yes and I got Miss Josie, and off to this meeting we go. First thing we get there it's "What's your name?" and I'm, like, "Sylvia." And the guy at the door said, "Don't you have a boy's name?" And I'm like, "Who? What?" So right away that was a setback. But I got involved, and the reason I stayed with them was for the gay rights bill. That's when we started petitioning for the gay rights bill, the New York City bill. And I felt comfortable being there.

That first meeting was where I met one of my best girlfriends even today: Bebe. She was sitting there, and I started talking to Josie in Spanish. I said, "Hmm...she looks like one of us," referring to her as a drag queen. She was a young child. We were just 19 years old. She turned and answered me in English, "I understood everything you said about me, and, yes, I'm one of you. I'm like you." And we became the best of friends.

The reason I stayed in GAA was the simple fact that I liked the idea that we, as an organization, were going to change the world. And there was a place for us. I fell right into the grand scheme of things. I remember I was out petitioning, I'd been doing it for a couple of weeks, and I remember that on April 15, 1970, I was petitioning on 42nd Street. I hadn't picked up why no gay men had come into the Times Square area. I figured that while they were up on 72nd Street, where most of the gay men were living at that time, or in the Village, I could take care of 42nd Street—my home turf.

There was a "Stop the War in Vietnam" demo and people started coming. The cops had dispersed the demo, and I'm standing out there collecting signatures, and two cops come by, and they say, "You have to move." And I'm like, "Why? All I'm doing is collecting signatures. I'm petitioning for gay rights."

"It's against the law."

I said, "What? I thought it said in the Constitution we have the right to acquire signatures..."

"You don't have an American flag."

"What does an American flag have to do with me collecting signatures?"

"You have to have an American flag."

I said, "It wouldn't make a difference. I've been to jail with poor Rosie over there, who is always being arrested with her American flag and her Bible for preaching the gospel." Rosie was a right-wing Bible-thumper. Well, I got arrested for petitioning for gay rights.

That's how my whole activist career started. Besides, I didn't consider that night at the Stonewall to be so important out of all the other movements going on. Getting that first arrest for something that I believed in was...wow, what a rush!

I bailed myself out of jail, and went to GAA the following day and told them what happened. We had a press conference, and Arthur Bell—may his soul rest in peace—grabbed me out of that meeting and dragged me to his apartment up in the 60s. And he says, "I'm going to put you up on a pedestal. You will be a star." I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah..." So we did an interview on the bus, and then he followed me for about a week on 42nd Street, collecting signatures from people: mature women and men, couples, heterosexuals, and gay people. That's how things started for me.

And I was happy at GAA for a while. But it wasn't my calling. I found out later on that they only believed in acquiring civil rights for the gay community as a whole. Which is fine. They did a lot of good just concentrating on the gay issue. But they left the queens behind.

I enjoyed Gay Liberation Front better because we concentrated on many issues for many different struggles. We're all in the same boat as long as we're being oppressed one way or the other, whether we are gay, straight, trans, black, yellow, green, purple, or whatever. If we don't fight for each other, we'll be put down. And after all these years, the trans community is still at the back of the bus.

I despise that. I'm hurt and get depressed a lot about it. But I will not give up because I won't give the mainstream gay organizations the satisfaction of keeping us down. If we give up, they win. And we can't allow them to win. The reason we, right now, as a trans community, don't have all the rights they have is that we allowed them to speak for us for so many damn years, and we bought everything they said to us: "Oh, let us pass our bill, then we'll come for you."

Yeah, come for me. Thirty-two years later and they're still coming for me. And what have we got? Here, where it all started, transpeople have nothing. We can no longer let people like the Empire State

Pride Agenda, the HRC in Washington, speak for us. And it really hurts me that some gay people don't even know what we gave for their movement.

It's like I was saying all this year during pride month: "It's not my pride, it's their pride. It's your pride, not mine. You haven't given me mine yet." I have nothing to be proud of except that I've helped liberate gays around the world. I have so many children and I'm still sitting on the back of the bus, still struggling to get kids into proper housing, and to get them education, to get them off drugs.

That's why we decided to resurrect STAR at the beginning of the year. Something has to be done. You need a grassroots organization that's willing to ruffle feathers and step on toes. STAR was born in 1971 right after a sit-in we had at New York University with the Gay Liberation Front. We took over Weinstein Hall for three days. It happened when there had been several gay dances thrown there, and all of a sudden the plug was pulled because the rich families were offended that queers and dykes were having dances and their impressionable children were going to be harmed.

So we ended up taking that place over. That's another piece of history that is very seldom told, even in regular gay history, about that sit-in. Maybe that's because it was the street queens once again who were still hanging around from 1969 with some of the radicals like Bob Kohler. He is a radical who is 75 years old and still out there working very hard doing his thing. He's been an ally to the trans community since I knew him and before I knew him. He's insulted and offended when the gay community doesn't turn out for our demos.

STAR House was born out of the Weinstein Hall demonstration, because there were so many of us living together, with Marsha and myself renting two rooms and the hotel room, and even then we still didn't have enough room to house people. With the help of GLF and Gay Youth, we threw our first fund-raiser and raised enough money to go to the Mafia and rent our first building. You can say anything you want about the Mafia—yes, they took advantage of us, but when we needed them, they were there.

They did open up tacky places for us to party in. And they got us a building for $300 a month. They were there for us. Marsha and I and Bubbles and Andora and Bambi kept that building going by selling ourselves out on the streets while trying to keep the children off the

streets. And a lot of them made good. A lot of them went home. Some of them I lost; they went to the streets. We lost them, but we tried to do the best we could for them. The contribution of the ones who didn't make it out into the streets, who wanted something different, was to liberate food from in front of the A&P and places like that, because back then they used to leave everything out in front of the store before it opened.

So the house was well-supplied, the building's rent was paid, and everybody in the neighborhood loved STAR House. They were impressed because they could leave their kids and we'd baby-sit with them. If they were hungry, we fed them. We fed half of the neighborhood because we had an abundance of food the kids liberated. It was a revolutionary thing.

We died in 1973, the fourth anniversary of Stonewall. That's when we were told we were a threat and an embarrassment to women because lesbians felt offended by our attire, us wearing makeup. It came down to a brutal battle on the stage that year at Washington Square Park, between me and people I considered my comrades and friends.

This was at pride. It was the year Bette Midler came to sing "Happy Birthday" for us. It was happy for the mainstream community, but it was not happy for us. They tried to stop drag queen entertainers from performing. I was angry because I had been scheduled for many months to speak at that rally. So I'm stubborn, and I wasn't going to have it. Because for four years we were the vanguard of the gay movement, and all of a sudden it was being taken away. We were being pushed out of something we helped create.

I remember this man telling me, a straight man who was my boss at the time, when I was working in Jersey—he said, "Ray, the oppressed becomes the oppressor. Be careful. Watch it." And I saw it. And I still see it. I literally had to fight my way up onto that stage. I was beat. I got to speak. I said my piece. And I basically left the movement for many years. I didn't come back into view until the 20th anniversary. And that was with David Isay's *Remembering Stonewall*.

He found me where I was in Tarrytown. I was living and working there. And then along came Martin Duberman and *Stonewall*. But I was really hurt in 1974. I tried to kill myself. I had 60 stitches on this arm after that incident. And I wasn't ever going to come back to the move-

ment. But you know who held fast to her word was Lee Brewster. When she got up and spoke after I did, she took off her tiara, threw it into the crowd and said, "Fuck gay liberation!"

What people fail to remember is, here's another drag queen who has not been recognized as a hero in our community. She put a majority of the money up for the first march in 1970. Lee Brewster changed the drinking laws for gay men to be able to be served in public at a regular bar instead of an after-hours club. She did this. Lee Brewster, with her own money, changed the laws on the books in New York against criminal impersonation that was held over drag queens' heads.

When she died and I wrote an obituary for her, these freaking gay rag newspapers didn't even have the balls to put in her accomplishments—even after her death. Yes, I'm angry with this fucking community. I wish sometimes that 1969 had never happened, they make me so angry. But it happened, and I have a whole lot of children. One of my most beautiful moments, all these years, was in 2000 at world pride when the Italian transexual organization in Bologna invited Julia and me to participate. I got to speak to all those people that have oppressed our community. Because it's not just here in the United States with the mainstream community but all over.

It's astonishing to see how history repeats itself. But I reminded all those 500,000 children out there that day that if it wasn't for us, they would not be where they're at today. They wouldn't have anything, none of them, from one corner of the world to the other. Because it was our community, the street kids, the street queens of that era, who fought for what they have today. And they still turn around and give us their backs.

So STAR has been officially restarted since January 6, 2001. What happened is, we were at church services at the Metropolitan Community Church and they were calling for monitors for the upcoming trial of Amanda Milan's* assassins. So I spoke to Julia during this whole thing, and Reverend Pat was giving a sermon about it, and I thought, *We can't let this just die. What are courtroom monitors going to do?* I said we got to keep Amanda in the public's eye. That's the only way people are going to realize the plight we're going through.

*25-year-old transwoman murdered on Manhattan street June 20, 2000, by assailants who cut her throat.

And during the sermon Reverend Pat talked about the three kings. And he said, "Who are we to say that the three kings were not three queens? Only queens would get up in the middle of the night and throw elaborate stuff into bags and travel to the other ends of the earth not knowing where they're going, but they knew they had to be there. And they followed the star."

So I told her, "We have to do it."

That whole day was telling me what to do—the sermon and the fact that Amanda's murderers were coming up for trial and we had not kept pressure and visibility on it. We were three queens following the STAR. And that's it. The only word I changed was *Transvestite* to *Transgender.*

We raised a lot of hell back when STAR first started, even if it was just a few of us. We ate and slept demonstrations, planning demonstrations. We'd go from one demo to another, the same day. We were doing what we believed in. And what we're doing now, the few of us who are willing to unsettle people and ruffle up feathers, is what we believe in doing. We have to do it because we can no longer stay invisible. We have to be visible. We should not be ashamed of who we are. We have to show the world that we are numerous. There are many of us out there.

Unfortunately, many of us have to live by night, because of the lack of laws or protections. A lot of transwomen are standing out on street corners or working clubs. And many of them are highly educated, with college degrees. Many of us have to survive by selling our bodies. If you can't get a job, you have to do whatever it takes to live.

I live at Transy House now with Julia. We've lived there for four years. It's a communal house run by Rusty [Mae Moore] and Chelsea [Goodwin]. They started it eight years ago and run it after the model of STAR House. Chelsea was one of my original children at STAR House. It's a safe house for girls who are still working the streets. It gives them a roof over their heads without having to hustle for money. They pay $50 a week if they can afford it. If not, they help out around the house. One girl cleans up for her board. The only rules are no drugs and no business done on the premises by working girls. And one of the political things we do is lobby for the legalization of medical marijuana for cancer patients and AIDS patients, along with the struggle for transgender rights.

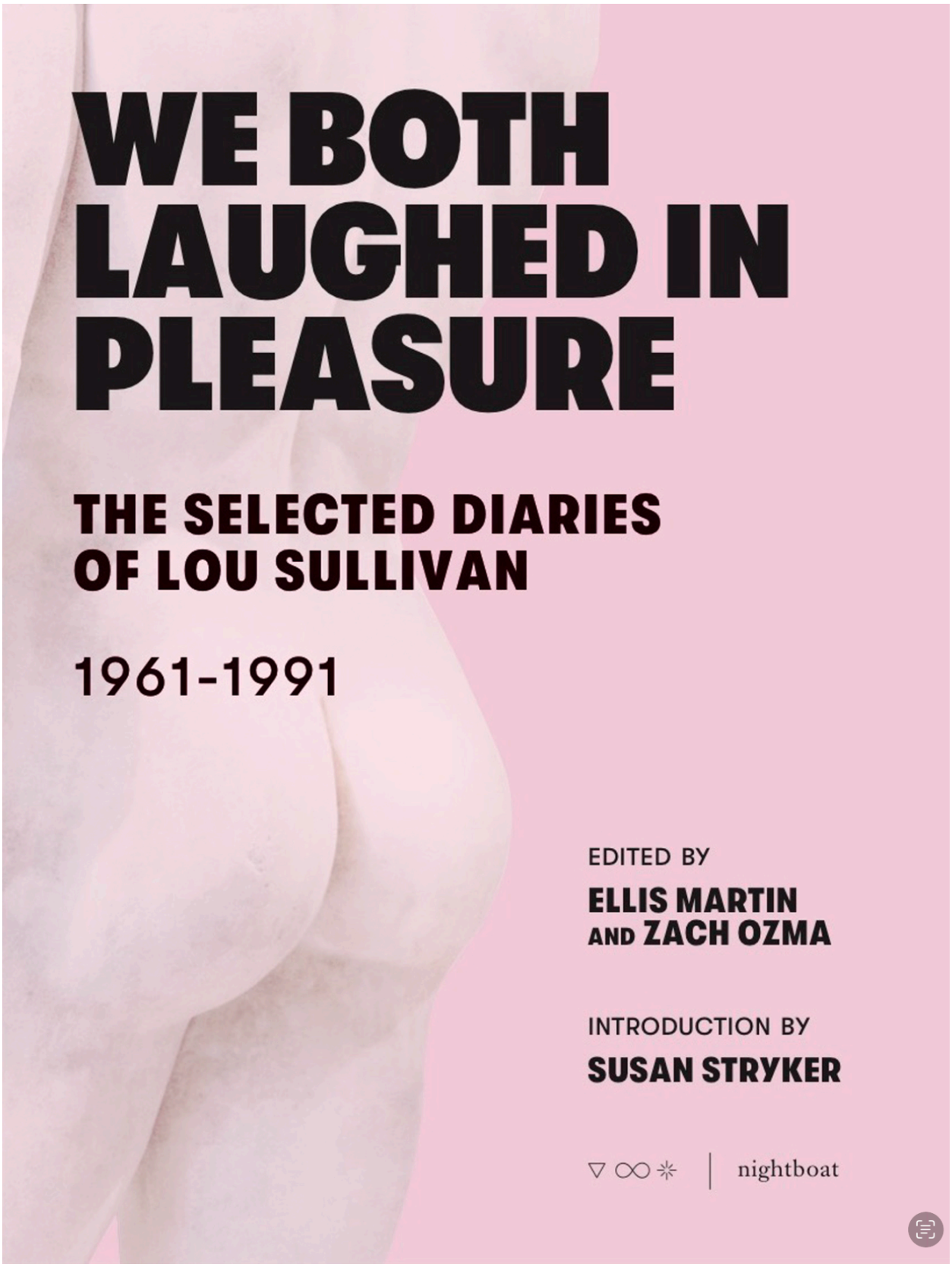
It's a shame that more people in the trans community don't open up houses like Rusty and Chelsea are doing with Transy House. We get

calls all the time from city and state agencies looking to place people, and we have to tell them, "Look, we're constantly filled up and we're doing this by ourselves without support from anyone." There are lots of shelters for people with AIDS but no safe house for people without AIDS. There's no safe shelter for these kids, so they end up sleeping on the streets. It hurts to see this still going on after 30 years, when Marsha and I first started trying to do something about it.

I'm happy that I've seen this new civil rights legislation introduced in the New York city council. It's historic, and I'm glad that we all came out in numbers at the hearing because it made an impression, even though the major news media didn't cover us. Octavia St. Laurent said it last year at Amanda's funeral. "Men have rights, women have rights, children have rights, gays have rights, lesbians have rights, animals have rights...we ain't got shit."

Before I die, I will see our community given the respect we deserve. I'll be damned if I'm going to my grave without having the respect this community deserves. I want to go to wherever I go with that in my soul and peacefully say I've finally overcome.

Editors' Note: Sylvia died on February 19, 2002, from complications of liver cancer. She was 50 years old.


WE BOTH LAUGHED IN PLEASURE
THE SELECTED DIARIES OF LOU SULLIVAN
1961-1991
EDITED BY
ELLIS MARTIN AND ZACH OZMA
INTRODUCTION BY
SUSAN STRYKER
nightboat

Well I'm not a scientist. But I know
all things begin and end in eternity.

The Man Who Fell To Earth, 1976

Yesterday was the Annual Gay Pride Parade ☞ it was spectacular. The papers estimate 120,000 watching ☞ participating. I didn't march—maybe would have had I felt in a cheerier mood, but it didn't take long for me to get all choked up by it ☞ when the Gay Fathers Group contingent went by ☞ a young-man holding a little kid like Jakey on his shoulders ☞ the kid holding a sign saying "I'm Proud of My Gay Dad" I just couldn't hold back the tears any longer. I felt so deeply that they are my people—tho I know I can never be accepted as one of them.

Sunday nite slept over at J's. Monday had off work but he didn't. I took a nice bath, washed my hair, dressed in all black ☞ wore my binder for the 1st time in a long time—black pants, black T-shirt ☞ black long sleeve cotton shirt, tucked in but open. Silver pens in pocket, silver ID bracelet, silver sunglasses.

Went downtown ☞ some guy comes up to me ☞ says he's a photographer (gives me his card) compiling a book on people in SF ☞ he thinks I'd make an interesting addition to his photos ☞ would I sit for him? ☞ he'd give me copies of the pictures he took. I said ok ☞ we took the bus to his place.

He was close to my age, very clean-cut, looked intellectual. We barely spoke to each other. His place was very close to empty but for his backdrops, camera, some other of his photos tacked on the wall. I hardly even combed my hair. He stood me there, arranged the lighting ☞ took about 36 pictures. I hardly moved, he never told me what to do except "just turn your head slightly this way" stuff. I just shifted, gave my usual dirty looks (remember I used to call them Bobby Dylan looks?) ☞ punk postures.

When he finished I got the distinct impression of those people they say have sex with you ☞ then want you OUT of their sight immediately. He almost rushed me out, I said I'd get in touch with him. Went back downtown feelings 100 feet tall ☞ so punky. Outasite I'd been *discovered*! So much wanted to tell someone. Knew J's reaction would be one of jealousy ☞ why couldn't it have been him, instead of happy for me.

My motto, since I decided we had to get separate places, has been "let go." Not "let go of J," but just "let go."

Sat aft went to see David Bowie's movie. Came outa there envisioning how beautiful he is ☞ how I could look just like him if only I'd…more thought of mastectomy (that word sounds like a species of dinosaur) ☞ sterilization. There's a TV-TS drop-in rap group in Berkeley at a reputed Center[14] every 1st ☞ 3rd Wed of the month. I should go ☞ talk this out, get it settled in my mind once ☞ for all, one way or the other.

Wandered to that certain bar David thought I'd like. It's funny how it happens but I'm standing there, casually surveying the crowd, really not OUT for anything then my eyes fall on this gorgeous thing I'm star-struck → "HIM." I sidled up to him, asked if I could buy him a drink. He says "Oh I'd just love a Coca Cola !" Oh my God he's a real live doll. So incredibly thin graceful tall giddy, his face is perfect, Rudolf Nureyev, when he was beautiful.

We danced sexy a little, I got him another soda, I can't believe how slender his hips are ("And oh dear God he has slim hips that could go into a small bottle"[15]). He is smiling, laughing, gyrating to the music. He kissed me I proceeded to continue kissing his perfect neck, his bare neck, his bare chest at his partially opened shirt. He was fragrant with perfume make-up he was smiling, still quiet, his eyes closed as I kissed tasted him. Oh God. Pleasure I hadn't felt since (dare I say) that fart M.

It was near bar closing time he went off to "make the rounds one more time." I saw him circle past once wink at me, then he disappeared. Ah, sweet moments! Another vanishing angel in the night. (Such a sentimental fool! I figure I got my buck's worth of kisses off his neck!)

On the street we ran into some guy who used to work next door to J's work. J introduced me to him as "Lou" we shook hands, then the guy leans his arm on my shoulder says "Hey man, no offense or anything, but the first time I saw you come in (to J's work) I thought you were a girl in a tuxedo!" (Tuxedo ? ?) But I said, "oh, no," like how could you *possibly* have thought *that* J just smiled. That does it! I had been going back to introducing myself as Sheila, not using Lou anymore I'm causing as much controversy trying to be Sheila, as I feel I am trying to be Lou.

Told J I was going to a doctor at this TV/TS group to get this question straight in my mind he was obviously against it, even said I was wasting my time hanging around "with all those…..", but stopping short of whatever he was going to call us.

Yesterday I phoned the psychologist I'd seen, when going crazy trying to find a job, at the Center for Special Problems. Told her I thought I was ready for their TS group. She asked me to call the group coordinator tomorrow she'll tell her to expect my call. So I phoned her today. She warned me the group was all male-to-female, if that bothered me. Told her they're the only kind I've had contact with so far. We made an appointment to meet talk next Monday.

I really hope it helps to go thru this doctor bit. I'm so weary of considering it. I just want a mastectomy to get sterilized continue living this half half life. I don't feel this surgery would make me a better man or woman, but I know it would make me a better person. I don't believe I can successfully live as a man or as a women.

But I have to do all I can to live comfortably this surgery would do that. I have never felt as sure of that as I do now.

It's really difficult for me to write down what's been going on, my feelings, etc. The 2 weeks between when I first talked to Claire Capor (the counselor for transsexuals) → our first session were ridden with hectic downs → euphoric ups. My thoughts were so laden with this switching-over idea I could barely function at work. I tried unceasingly to step outside myself, see myself as others would, trying to imagine what I'd be like as a male, how I would pass, how it'd be different, how I'd be different, could I really make it, what about my job, J, etc, etc.

And then, like an angel sent just for me! Saturday morning's paper on the front page, just for me:[16]

I knew immediately that I had to talk with her → she could set me on the right path. Just the thought there was *someone else* like me!—I told J I would write her to meet with her → we had our first real discussion. The two things he said that stuck in my mind were "What are we going to be afterwards? Friends ? ? I'm basically *straight*, you know!" and "I'm going to use as much of my influence to stop you from doing it as other people are influencing you *to* do it." And that in essence if I do go thru with the change I will have seen the last of him. He said that. I felt pretty bad. Later that night we had a second, similar talk. He said my ambiguity was one of the few things that made me "interesting." Afterwards I cried while talking with Charles about it, saying I don't want to be interesting, I want to be happy.

He pointed out how J → I go back → forth threatening to leave each other—me because of his alcoholism, he because of my transsexualism. That it seemed absurd to him that I was ready to part with J forever only a few weeks ago → now I'm trembling at the idea of him leaving me. And that he felt I was mostly upset because this is the first rejection I've gotten because of my wish to switch. Good point.

Sunday I penned my letter, Monday I mailed it c/o the high school.

And Wednesday at 6 am my morning paper brought me a picture I'd so wished for → a beautiful beautiful article. I re-read it over → over, stared enchanted at the picture. He was so so beautiful. I felt as tho I were seeing myself.

Took the paper to work, vowed not to discuss it because I was so high on it I couldn't trust myself not to burst. The women at work gathered around one of their desks over the article → I could see them discussing it, laughing, but all I heard was one say it was probably harder to switch to a man than to a woman. No one said a word to me. I was too high to go sit outside → have lunch with the warehouse foreman like I've done for the past few months.

J phoned → asked if I'd seen the article, saying "He really looks good"—me just holding myself back from bursting with emotion. Counting each minute to hear from her, each phone call I got I knew it must be him.

Thurs the foreman asked if I was going to have lunch with him cuz there's something he wants to ask me about. At lunch he says he wanted to ask me about the women who had a sex change, "Can they really do that?" I said "Oh yeah!" → launched into an outline of the procedures, etc, → finally said, "Don't tell anyone this, but I've been thinking of doing that same thing myself." He lent his support,

saying when I first came there the women had talked about me, “I wonder which bathroom she’s going to use” ✓ he told them I could use the one in the warehouse if I wanted.

He confided “don’t tell anyone this but” he has a “homosexual” son. I felt so great after our talk, felt I really had a friend. Since then he’s said things like “That-a-girl…er, I guess I should say, that-a-boy,” and that I’m his “buddy” and “pretty soon they’re not going to let you in there [the women’s room] anymore!”

Monday my session with Claire Capor. I felt something like an insect under a microscope ✓ weighed each word I said, knowing what could be read into anything I said. We discussed my background, how I felt about the parents, my first boyfriend, how I found out how men ✓ women have sex. She asked had I ever seen 2 men having sex with each other ✓ I said I don’t remember ever having.

Afterwords I asked her what the point in rehashing all this was. She said to try ✓ see why I’m doing what I am ✓ if it’s worthwhile for me to continue. That I had to admit it wasn’t a “typical reaction.” Ok, that sounds harmless enough.

But talked later with Charles, expressing my apprehension at the worth of it ✓ my fear that my defenses ✓ securities will be destroyed. That no matter WHY I’m doing it, I want to continue doing it ✓ that’s that. So why find out why? Etc, etc. But I knew that that’s only fearing the truth ✓ if rehashing all these things in my past (that *I’ve* tried to interpret as causes *years* ago) will break me, I better find that out now.

I don’t know how often I’ve re-read it now. And now I realize my biggest hang-up is my lack of self-confidence, lack of respect for my own judgement ✓ my inability to make a decision that will affect my whole life. I am plagued by fear of the unknown future, tho I know in my heart I feel the same way now as I did 10 years ago. With this new awareness I’ve decided to look into the possibility of getting myself sterilized. Even if I have doubts of my ability to live as a man, I have no doubts of my inability to live as a woman with child. Haven’t told J ✓ won’t until the day before the operation ✓ am finally resolved to not let his reaction change my mind. Went to Planned Parenthood but they were closed, will call them Monday. It’s incredible the feeling of oneness ✓ peace with myself I have once I make a decision like this. You don’t have to be a transsexual to get sterilized ✓ I want it badly. No more intense fear, horror at the thought of what I’d do if I became pregnant, disgust at the thought of bearing ✓ having to center my life around this child, out of guilt ✓ the feeling I should be responsible, guilt identifying with how J would feel about the kid. I know he’s very against abortion, therefore must want his children. But even though—they’ll have to be someone else’s. I can’t.

J ✓ I had our first decent discussion on my problem. He said a lot of stuff that makes sense ✓ I really feel good about the whole talk.

He said he didn’t feel any operation was the answer for me because he sees my problem as being “mainly one of fashion,” i.e., I am tired of the *look* I have now and just can’t think what to do next.

He says (and it's true) that if I were to switch over it still wouldn't solve my social identity probably because, like him, I don't know how to be a typical male, that I'll never dress like everyone else or act like everyone else. No matter what, I'll never fit in with either the male or the female scene.

He compared my obsession with surgery with his alcoholism; saying I go toward that direction just because it's so easy for me to give in to my desires, just as it's easy for him to wander into the bar.

He said no matter how many operations I have or bodybuilding courses I take I'll never look how I dream I want to, that I should rather look toward an ideal I can reach, like Romaine Brooks. That maybe I should try wearing some women's suits like I used to.

I must say that since this talk with him, it's the first time in months I've really felt the idea of switching over is not right for me at all—that I should try to look in another direction.

He said he thinks it's a good idea for me to see Steve Dain but that I shouldn't go into it with a hero-worshiping attitude.

Somehow I have to learn to love myself as the weirdo boyish female I am.

It's impossible for me to avoid becoming deeply attached to her (Dain)—I like to call him her because it allows me to identify more easily, to really grasp what he is. I cannot help falling in love with him. I feel he is my soul. Anyway at the rate his hassles are going, I'll never get to meet him. I wish somehow I could be of some help to him.

I had my 1st gay infatuation. It's so fucked up I feel nauseous even thinking about it ⊹ it really tears me up inside. He was about 43 yrs old, small, attractive guy. J ⊹ I met him in J's favorite straight bar. Name was Cal. I just feel so shitty. He was pretty drunk by the time we got there ⊹ began talking to us, saying he's seen us "two guys" ⊹ watched us several times—that we reminded him of two hitmen out of Dashiell Hammett (some 1940s detective story writer) and "I really like you 2 guys…you got a certain, ah…class."

Then he began to "read our beads" saying he's observed us often ⊹ he sees J as "a villain," not very flexible or open ⊹ a cynical person. But he sees me as a man with a sense of humor, much more open to different things, that J can't adjust to change. But that I have a whole realm of possibilities to choose from. That J is basically happy with his job ⊹ his life, but that I'm not. Well, of course he knew how to hold our attention, as everyone likes to talk about themselves.

Something very girlish about him. He had lovely expressive eyes ⊹ brows and almost involuntarily he'd look in mine. I'd look back and he'd wince, a visible hurt as he studied my eyes, and then he'd look away.

It's as tho my whole inner core of who or what I am is totally stripped away. I wonder how much longer I can continue to function, and that's the truth. I feel more ✈ more alienated from *myself*. How can I gather up the pieces of my mind? I can't think of anything, *anything* but this switch over. It just permeates my entire mind. And I'm so so tired of it.

Ridiculous when my whole crusade was to be a feminine gay male. And also my inability to merge into a male-male relationship with J, even tho I know now it would have been impossible. *I* knew I was acting strangely toward him, that I wasn't relaxed or really *me*…that with the only person I've really felt at ease around. Maybe I *would* have fallen into the Miss Plastic Surgery syndrome—always blaming one thing or another for the fact that I'm not a "real man." I hate to face it, but it's true: I would never be entirely comfortable as a male.

Because in my heart I know I am nothing.

And so the big trip to Milw turned out OK.

Eldon talked to me in length about my identity crises ✈ ended up telling me I am a transvestite ✈ why don't I just relax with that?

Had an in-depth talk with ma about my conflicts ✈ out of nowhere she said she thought sterilization would be right for me, after she'd made such a scene when Johnney wanted a vasectomy.

The only real low of the visit was trying to deal with dad's depression because of the divorce, his business failing, etc, but when I tried to make realistic suggestions he finally said "Sheila, don't try to help me too much." So that ended my sympathy.

I've returned to SF feeling pretty free of my gender conflict ✈ with an acutely raised sexual desire of J. I must pursue my own ideal of the perfect male/female balance ✈ not try to oust one for the other. Somehow my clothes have regained their fetishistic quality ✈ I guess Eldon is right. I am a transvestite.

Eldon had said to me, "What happened to the Sheila who went after Charles after that GPU meeting?"

I laughed, surprised he remembered, but he told me he ✈ Lowell were in a car ✈ had offered me a ride ✈ I'd told them to get lost. Eldon said he knew right then I was after Charles. Eldon asked, what happened to that person?—

After work went to the bar I like best in SF, Sutter's Mill. Haven't been there in a long time. It's in the Financial District ✈ is where the gay businessmen go after work in their suits ✈ ties. No one interesting, bore, bore, and *then*, he was about 35, dressed casual, obviously as alone as I. I moved to get a direct view of him leaning on the bar ✈ I cruised my heart out.

Stared. Wondering what I'd do if it came down to it. And I'm pretty sure he was aware—he kept looking in my direction but not sure if at me. I decided if it did come down to it, I'd make the stipulation that I don't like to be touched ⇢ then I'd just do him, suck him.

The guy was really good looking, rather male model. After a long time of me staring, cruising like mad, he puts on his coat ⇢ I got ready. He had to walk right in front of me ⇢ I grasped his arm, "You leaving?"

"Yes," he smiled. "I have to make a phone call ⇢ then go to a meeting," ⇢ he looked down, "unfortunately." I said "Too bad." He said, "Well have a nice evening" ⇢ left.

I really would've gone through with it.

I honestly think I'm beginning to lose my mind ⇢ something has to give soon. Yesterday ⇢ today wandered around the streets looking for I don't know what—anything to save me from this empty sinking. It's incredible how lonely I am.

The gays—but how are they to accept me? how do I fit in ? The feminists—they always object to my dress, they won't embrace me. The lesbians—but I like men ⇢ don't want to jeopardize J's ⇢ my relationship by getting a female lover. The straights—no way. The transvestites—they're all male → female ⇢ put the make on me, no friendship possible. I can't relate to *anyone*.

I've "broken" the 3-year spell I've had over myself.

I went downtown alone ⇢ went thru the women's depts. My counselor told me if I do go to take my time looking ⇢ trying things on ⇢ not to panic. I kept that in mind. Had no bad experiences with people at all. Tried on 2 dresses at the 1st store—lousy. Nothing at the 2nd one ⇢ at the 3rd one I bought a dress for $25. Very much like the kind of dress I used to wear. Then to the 4th store where I looked more ⇢ bought nylons.

At home I put them on ⇢ I couldn't get over how the whole experience was no big deal. It wasn't strange for me at all. I felt like the person I was 4 years ago—not that long. I parted my hair and smoothed it back instead of pompadouring it. But I had to wear my boy's "ROTC" shoes (as one salesman at Wilson[17] called them).

Phoned J at work ⇢ said "Guess what?" I could hear his reluctance to ask, he must be so tired of my "decisions." "I went ⇢ bought a dress ⇢ I'm wearing it right now." He was thoroughly freaked, "Really? Oh, my God! (Laughed incredulously) Oh, my God! Does it feel weird?"

I was a little offended he was so shocked.

I know I'm really going to have to be strong to juggle my 2 halves, but I can get thru anything after the torments of the past summer.—I phone the doc ✓ called off the sterilization ✓ had him prescribe B.C. pills for me.

Feeling so much better, in general, than I have in months ✓ months. Have gone to the women's group therapy session twice now plus am still seeing my counselor on an individual basis on Mondays. Already I have had an awakening at the group sessions. There are 5 other women besides me ✓ 2 women therapists. This last session they talked mostly about feeling you have to *do* something with your life or *make* something of yourself. I didn't say 2 shits ✓ was getting pretty bored.

Right at the end the leader asked why I had been so quiet ✓ I said I didn't get what this group therapy was all about, it seemed to me it was just a bunch of people shooting the bull. The one girl I like best there asked if the reason I thought they were just shooting the bull was because they were just women. My first instinct was to immediately deny that, but I said yes realizing if this had been a bunch of gay men talking about what they should do with their lives, I'd've thought the whole thing terribly interesting.

When I told J how I was bored listening to women talk when I wouldn't had men been saying the exact same things, he agreed with me, saying he feels the same way. Which really made me feel put down ✓ I wonder how much of my self-hatred of my female side has been fed by this same outlook. He said he found it self-indulgent. I began thinking how he ✓ I aren't really getting along all that differently now that I'm being a girl than from our conflicts when I felt I was a boy. J looks down on women (and that includes me) just as much as I do. Big help he is.

We had somewhat of an argument on machismo ✓ I realized that whereas I romanticize it, fantasize it, though never would want it to be a reality—he would. He believes it all ✓ takes it seriously, where I don't. Scary. He's worried I'll "turn into a lesbian" if I begin to hang out with women, yet he isn't making himself too endearing.

Told my shrink how I'd cried Fri nite so unexpectedly. How I really felt I had let myself down by not going thru with my desire to be male. She asked how much of my giving it up had been due to the fact that I would lose J had I continued. How much of it was because of him ✓ how much of it was because I felt it wasn't me. And how much of the feeling that it wasn't me was because I didn't have the support of the physical attributes of a man.

She asked why I abandoned my pursuit of the switch-over ✓ I told her becuz I felt smothered by my own fantasy. That as a man I felt whole inside but uncomfortable on the outside, trying to communicate with others, etc. Now as a female I feel empty inside but feel freer to relate to others. That I always felt had J not been around, if he got killed by a train, I would definitely go towards being male—that I'd even hoped somehow he'd get out of my life so I'd be free to be a man.

Pleasure Gardening with Tourmaline
Audio Transcript

Introducing Pleasure Gardening with Tourmaline

Tourmaline:Hi, I'm Tourmaline. I’m an artist, filmmaker,and writer based in New York. In honor of Juneteenth, a holiday that celebratesthe freedom of enslaved people in the United States, I explored some sitesof resistance and liberation throughout New York City that have been importantto me. I visited these places with my friend T. Lax.
T. Lax: Hello. My name is Thomas Lax, also known asT., and I'm a curator in the Department of Media and Performance at MoMA.
Tourmaline:The title of this tour is “Pleasure Gardening.”It is an invitation to be in our pleasure, to feel ourselves, and not continueto think that we can somehow separate our pleasure from our desire for freedomfor our greater community.
T. Lax:I see Tourmaline’s project as an open invitationinto Black space, a real and metaphorical place, where many people can gather intheir vast differences, to practice their wildest visions of freedom.
Tourmaline: You’ll hear from us and from a few peoplewhose own freedom dreaming tends to these places and inspires me todream bigger.
Cynthia R. Copeland.
Cynthia R. Copeland:These people found a way to behere and these people found a way to make a way out of no way.
Tourmaline:Mariame Kaba
Mariame Kaba:If you are steeped in Black historyin the United States, we know that in the most repressive environments, mutual aidis essential for people's survival, it's survival work.
Tourmaline:AndRobin D. G. Kelley
Robin D. G. Kelley:Liberation is not necessarilysomething that we sort of achieve by getting to the mountain top. But it's a constantprocess of cultivation.
Tourmaline:Pleasure gardens were real places in NewYork City in the 1820s. They had nature. They had fireworks. They had hot air balloons.There were

Black-owned pleasure gardens, places where Black people, when slavery was still legal in New York, would go and be able to be witheach other in nature.
In this audio, you'll hear about Black residents inNew York City who established places for self-actualization and dreaming; placeswhere people could come together without the threat of violence, they couldform community, and help one another, and even just be.
We've included a map and images so you're welcometo listen at the sites or wherever you are.

Boarding House for Black Sailors, 330 Pearl Street(Part 1)

T. Lax:Who were the Black sailors who were comingand finding refuge? Tourmaline:We're right on the East River, so Blacksailors were working on these boats. And there was very few places to stay, butsome of the people who were sailors were just people on the run. We're at 330 Pearl Street in front of a 5-story buildingwith a faded brick exterior and a grid of windows. This building was erected afterthere was a boarding house here for Black sailors. Here's Cynthia R. Copeland. Cynthia R. Copeland: Being a mariner is typical forAfrican-American males. It's one of the jobs that is easy for them to have. Andit set up all kinds of networks for messages to get to and from places, so that peoplewould know what was happening in the world and how to move people through—freedomseekers trying to make their way north, as far north as they possiblycould. And so the Lyons family are there—Albro Lyons andMary Lyons—taking over this space of the Colored Sailors Home from about 1851until about 1862, just before the Civil War. They offer shelter, education, foodto the Mariners who are there. It's also one of these spaces that is kind of usedas an Underground Railroad. You know, you get this connection of people through thisthat you are able to know, oh, this is the conductor in such and such a space, soyou want to go that way. Or we're going to set sail from the pier on the West side andhead in such and such a direction. And so there is a lot of effort to movepeople around, clandestinely, through this space. The Lyons family--they are a prominent Abolitionist-reformist,African American family. They are trying to get suffrage for blackmales and so that is happening again through these networks on the sea. So I thinkthat the colored Mariners space

afforded them lots of ability to make a difference and to take care of Black folk in the city.
Tourmaline: Up until 1809, Black people couldn't inheritland in New York City. And in order to vote, having $250 worth of propertyand living here for three years was a requirement for Black people in New York City.So there were all of these ways that anti-Black racism was built into the architectureof the city that came down to land ownership.
Not only were the Lyons family creating a greatersense of safety here, and a place of refuge and sanctuary. But also they were architectingthe blueprint for our expansion north in a moment of pronounced violencehere in lower Manhattan.

Boarding House for Black Sailors, 330 Pearl Street(Part 2)

T. Lax:As you're describing the active life of thishistory and making it felt and present for all of us, there's this other piece thatyou're summoning, which is unknowable in history proper, with a capital H, butthat you, nevertheless, make available. And here I'm thinking about the kind offreedom dreaming that might have happened between sailors who were finding succorand refuge with one another through practices of, we could call it non-normativesexuality, queerness, pleasure.
Tourmaline: I think that to me what feels most compellingis thinking about those moments of lightness and fun and pleasure in the gapsthat surround a historical archive of Black life in New York City.
Thinking about all the delicious sex that was happeningat the Boarding House between the Black sailors as an extension of the pleasureground and pleasure gardens that were also happening. And so, I don’tknow—I think I'm also looking for the fun. I think so often when we talk about the pastand Black life, it gets so quickly reduced to these moments of utter tragedy or deepheroics. And so these small, everyday moments of intimacy and pleasure feels, tome, like, where the life really is.
Tourmaline: My college professor, historian RobinD. G. Kelley coined the term “freedom dreaming” in his book%QDDCNL #QD@LR 3GD!K@BJ 1@CHB@K (L@FHM@SHNM
Robin D. G. Kelley: "Without new visions. We don'tknow what to build. Only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless,and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series ofclever maneuvers and tactics, but a process that can and must transform us."

We can't move forward if we're always fighting the demon in front of us. We've got to move beyond it and think about what we're tryingto build. All the stories of those moments of feeling free inspaces that were designed for confinement, designed as enclosure, designed not tobe spaces of liberation, that we make our freedom in our actions sometimes. So whenyou're talking about the embrace of another in a world where that embrace isrendered illegal or immoral, you know, you're basically seizing freedom. Liberation is not necessarily something that we achieveby getting to the mountaintop. But it's a constant process of cultivation.

African Society for Mutual Relief, 42 Baxter Street(Part 1)

Tourmaline: We're in the park across from 42 Baxter,which was formerly the site of the African Society for Mutual Relief.
T. Lax:And so here we are in Columbus Park.
Tourmaline: Oh my God. Here we are in Columbus Park.
T. Lax:And what a park it is. It's really, we're—wehave like white runners, a lot of Chinese folks playing Mahjong. And then in the formersite of freedom that we decided to—you brought us to—
Tourmaline: Look how quickly the blame game happens.
T. Lax:Thank you for bringing us to this prison,Tourmaline.
Tourmaline: In the former site of that we—actuallyyou
T. Lax:You brought us to a prison. Tell us aboutthat.
Tourmaline: Tell us about your decision. Oh my God.So live from under the bus that T. threw me, I'm going to talk a little bit aboutMYdecision.
So the African Society for Mutual Relief was a placewhere people could donate and put money into in order to have a kind of safety netwhen Black people were excluded from schooling and life insurance and buyingproperty. So this was a way that people would come together and have a sense ofsecurity and stability with one another that was really necessary.
It's now a prison. So, to me, nothing is more clarifyingabout the world that I want to live in than a prison. When I am so up close toa place that is so about limiting

freedom, it's so clarifying how much freedom we want. And how much ease we want, with being able to move around with pleasureand softness and receptivity.
Mariame Kaba is an activist and a writer. I invitedher to tell you more about the African Society for Mutual Relief.
Mariame Kaba: What they wanted to do was to establishan independent autonomous Black organization in New York City thatwould unite to combat racism and oppression and to provide mutual aid and supportfor each other.
People have to understand what it was like to be aBlack person who either was enslaved or had been emancipated at that period oftime. It's not like there were social services around that people could go and access.It's not like the jobs they had provided significant financial ways to take careof themselves and their families.
Part of the mutual aid that people were engaged inat the African Society for Mutual Relief was having a whole floor that was dedicatedto the underground railroad as a site for people to come and hide, when they were escapingenslavement or when they were running from slave catchers.
They really focused on trying to meet the most basichuman needs. And one of those basic human needs was burial. In 1794, the citydecided to close down the African burial ground and make it really difficultfor Black people to then be able to bury their loved ones. And in a city like New York,at that time, where Black people died young and in large numbers, burial was superimportant to folks. Respecting Black people in death, if they couldn't be respectedin life, made a huge, huge difference. And so they petitioned the common councilat the time, in order to be able to have the city provide burial grounds for Blackpeople. And they were successful in doing that.
Mutual aid was political survival and economic survivaland cultural survival for Black people, particularly in the 18th and 19th century.This was the only way that Black people could actually make sure that they couldtake care of themselves and each other.

African Society for Mutual Relief, 42 Baxter Street(Part 2)

Mariame Kaba: My name is Mariame Kaba. I am the founderand director of an organization called Project Nia, which is a prisonindustrial complex abolitionist organization with a long-term vision to end youthincarceration.

A lot of current prison-industrial complex abolitionists look back to the work of previous generations of abolitionists to continue to undo the afterlife of slavery in its multiple incarnations and iterations.
The current site of the African Society of MutualRelief, there is no trace at all of what stood there before. It's gone. And it's goneon purpose. And it's not lost on me that the criminal court is sitting there on that sameland where an autonomous organization built by Black people, who had themselvesbeen enslaved people and also some of whom were still enslaved when they weremembers, that the criminal court sits there, that racist death-making institutionthat exists today to disappear so many Black people. It's not, you know, it's notlost on me, that, that irony.
Tourmaline: It was here that people like Marsha P.Johnson in the 1970s had big freedom dreams filled with desires for care and supportfor other trans people facing incarceration.
Marsha was a poet. She was a singer. She was a performer.She was the original founder of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries—STAR.She was in the forefront of what was then called the gay liberationmovement. She was one of the people to fight back in 1969 during the StonewallRebellion that every year is celebrated in what we now know as Pride.
In this place, in 1973 or '72, Marsha P Johnson wasfrequently having court cases. There was a Black judge, Bruce Wright, who frequentlywas at odds with the state around bail, which was something that was used tokeep people of color, Black people, poor people in captivity. And Marsha appearedin front of him and he asked, “What's, what's the P in Marsha P Johnson?”And she said, “It stands for ‘pay it no mind.’" And, and the judge responded, "Well,that's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to pay it no mind.” And let her go.
Here’s historian Robin D. G. Kelley:
Robin D. G. Kelley: So much of our oppressions beginat the level of the body. Think about the bodies of women and femmes and transpeople, you're talking about bodies that have experienced probably the oldestwar of all, bodies that are policed, are subject to violence, to silencing. Soimagine freeing the body from the constraints of all the imposed normativities of genderand sexuality. So queer liberation—liberation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer-gender,trans, two-spirit people—we can't have any liberation without liberatingour bodies and our sexualities.
Tourmaline: There was an early '70s interview withMarsha P Johnson, and she was talking about how Black trans people are frequentlygoing into this specific institution, literally right here, and being heldlargely because people couldn't

afford to pay bail, right? So, she said, what we're going to do is start a bail fund for incarcerated members of our community.
That launching of a freedom dream of mutual reliefand mutual aid, Marsha was then being the realizer of that dream, even in a placethat exists as limiting freedom. Marsha was so able to tune into freedom dreamsthat came before from the African Society for Mutual Relief that she said,"Aha, I know what to do. I'm going to tune my tuner to that frequency of freedomby starting a bail fund."

David Ruggles's Home, 36 Lispenard Street

Tourmaline: We're at 36 Lispenard Street at the cornerof Church Street. It's now a 5-story brick building, but in the 1830s and 40s,there was a three-story building at this site that was home to David Ruggles. His homewas a stop on the Underground Railroad and he helped more than 600 people fleeingslavery. Ruggles was the founder and owner of the country's first African Americanbook store. Mariame Kaba is an activist who has been inspiredby David Ruggles. Mariame Kaba: Well, he's my favorite. He's extraordinaryin multiple ways, ahead of his time, by far, somebody who is unknown todayby most people. And that's a deep, deep shame. I think about it, particularly,for young Black people. There's so much that he made possible, in terms of the way thathe lived his life, for them in this current moment. He was one of the key people who created what he calledthe Committee of Vigilance, which was this group of overwhelminglyBlack people who were New York anti-slavery activists and he helped create ithere in Manhattan in 1835. And the goal of the committee was to protect defenseless,endangered persons of color by securing their rights as far as practicable. Itis those vigilance committees that basically become the institutionalized form of whatwe understand the Underground Railroad to be. He was the person who took in Frederick Douglas whenFrederick Douglas was scared and alone in New York City, after he had finallysuccessfully escaped from Maryland, the Eastern shore. He had him stay at hishouse for several days until Anna Marie, his fiance, could come. And they marriedin his house on Lispenard Street. Tourmaline:I grew up in Roxbury, which is a historicallyblack part of Boston, where people like Audrey Lorde and Malcolm X livedand created. And I grew up

next to Ruggles Square. And so It was really powerful to think about his life and his movement and the many places that he created from.
Mariame Kaba: David Ruggles coined this term “practicalabolition,” which meant that Black and white abolitionists had to confrontslave owners and their allies, even in the streets. And that you had to fight themin the streets. It didn’t matter. He and his colleagues believed that you had to bringabout change through direct action.
He founded the first Black magazine in the U.S., calledtheMHQQNQ NE +HADQSX. He used his magazine and his writing to alert the Blackcommunity when members of who he termed the "kidnapping club" in New York, whenthey were on the loose and the prowl, he would write up articles and he wouldalert people about what was going on.
He would board ships in the harbor to go find peoplewho he'd been told were being taken back down to the South. People who mayhave not actually ever have been enslaved in the first place, Black folks walkingdown the street who got grabbed and snatched by slave traders and slave catchers.And he literally would take out a gun and he would go over and he would de-arrestpeople and take them back into the community.
He talked about "whatever necessity requires, letthat remedy be applied." Right? "Come what may, anything is better than slavery."
He died when he was 39 years old in 1849, but he wasstill fighting till the very end against slavery and against racial discriminationand for justice and liberation for his people.

Seneca Village, Central Park between West 82nd andWest 89th Streets (Part 1)

Cynthia R. Copeland: My name is Cynthia Copeland andI am an educator and a public historian. I am the president of the Institutefor the Study of the Exploration of Seneca Village, which was a 19th century African-Americancommunity. And it stood on the site of what is today Central Park.
Tourmaline: I asked Cynthia to tell us about SenecaVillage and her role in uncovering and preserving its history.
Cynthia R. Copeland: We raised the question, “Wouldn'tit be great if we could do an archeological excavation in Central Park?”

We start with maps, with newspaper accounts, family papers, whatever we can find. And in this instance, we relied on church records,finding out who was baptized, who got married, who was buried in thesespaces. Those documents gave us an idea of the types of structures that existedon the landscape.
Once upon a time, the people who lived in Seneca Villageand in the pre-park expanse were considered tramps, squatters, and thievesthat didn't have a right to the land. There was this smear campaign in the newspapersto say that these people lived in shanties and shacks.
And all the research that we uncovered told a differentstory. It showed that the people actually did own the land. They did have rightsto be there. We found indication that they were two- and three story-framedhouses. Some had barns, some had basements, some had sheds.
We found a slate pencil to suggest that educationwas really important, that people were literate. We found the handle of a bone toothbrush,which suggests hygiene is very important because not everybody was brushingtheir teeth back then. We found the sole of a shoe—it's likely the shoe of ayoung woman or a child—which was so moving. A couple of the students who workedwith us, tears just came out of nowhere because it was just so exciting to be ableto see that.
Seneca Village was a self-determining community, withloving families and loving relationships. It was a response and a reaction toliving life in isolation, living life as de-humanized, living life as, you're just not supposedto be here. Well, these people found a way to be here and these people found a wayto make a way out of no way. You had this great expanse. You could build and youcould grow. And it was like a utopia. And so you get that sense that they were freeto live the lives that they wanted. It's about freedom.

Seneca Village, Central Park between West 82nd andWest 89th Streets (Part 2)

T. Lax:Where are we within Seneca Village?
Tourmaline:So we are in Summit Rock. This is oneof my favorite places in the park because it's very high up and, at different moments,you can feel completely surrounded by the tree life. And then also you canturn your head and there's a high-key juxtaposition with the big buildings rightthere.

This used to be marshland and farms. There used to be churches and cemeteries and schools. There was prosperity, not necessarilyin the capitalist sense, but just in feeling the abundance of what is possible.
T. Lax:When did you first start coming to SenecaVillage?
Tourmaline:In about 2002. When I first started cominghere, I felt really angry and upset. I was really focused on the tragedy, whichwas—this was a place that was destroyed to make Central Park. And then, I startedto widen out and what became more pronounced was the real power of people comingtogether to feel each other's pleasure, to feel a sense of freedom, to littleby little release outdated beliefs that you couldn't buy land if you were Black,or that you couldn't vote if you were Black.
In a moment when, in lower Manhattan, in the 1800s,there was a lot of fires being set to Black-owned churches and establishments. Slaverywas still legal. People were regularly kidnapped from New York and sold south.So it was a really intense kind of contrast between what was happening in thecity at large and what was happening here in Seneca Village. There was a senseof autonomy and self determination that moved through here.
T. Lax:And who would you say are the caretakers forthat history?
Tourmaline:It’s any of us who are speaking it whoor are feeling it, who are here having fun. It's like the birds, it's the trees. It'sthe bee that just flew by. I think it's the people who are unruly to the times that the parksclose, or, you know, what you can and can't do in a park. It's the people who arestill very angry about what happened. So it's an ever-expanding group of caretakers.
To me, it feels like a living memorial. When peoplegather here, high on the spirit of what came before, but are present in the what's happeningnow, what are we doing with this space, now? That to me feels like a reallyvibrant monument to the spirit of Seneca Village.

Pleasure Gardening for Today and Tomorrow

Tourmaline: In this moment of Juneteenth and Pride,I think about how important it is to make sure that we know that these are inextricablylinked—the self-determination and self-actualization and thepower of trans people, and queer people, and gender non-conforming people who are Blackis so necessary and urgent. So we can't pretend that we're talking aboutfreedom, unless we're talking about the freedom of Black, trans and gender nonconformingand non-binary people.

T. Lax:Thank you so much for joining us on Tourmaline’s Pleasure Gardening Audio Tour. It's our hope that as you pass by these placestoday or in the future, you might remember those who came before and those whocared for each other against all odds, perhaps like them, you might findways to stay close to love and freedom in unfree spaces, to build your ow pleasuregardens.

We're so grateful to everyone who lent their voiceto this tour, including Cynthia R. Copeland, President of the Institute for the Explorationof Seneca village; Mariame Kaba, Director of Project NIA; Robin D. G. Kelley,Distinguished Professor and Gary B. Nash Endowed Chair in US history at the Universityof California, Los Angeles; and of course, Tourmaline, my friend and creativepartner.

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Drawing by Joaquin Golez @other_eros